

A S C A W E B I N A R S E R I E S



How to Get Into a Military Service Academy

Webinar Presenter: Michael Dobson
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Introduction

Learning Outcomes

- Advise and counsel students on whether a service academy education is right for them.
- Coach and guide students through all aspects of the applications process, including the Congressional nomination.
- Provide practical advice for students with special situations, including minority status, hardship circumstances, and health issues.

Outline

1. About the Academies
2. Preparing for Admission
3. The Admissions Process
4. Getting Nominated
5. Special Issues and Concerns
6. Final Steps, Tricks and Resources



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About the Academies

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Why Attend a Service Academy?

- Ranked among the best colleges in the country
- Tuition free (paid by a service obligation)
- Room and board included
- Salary* as a student
- Guaranteed job upon graduation

*except Merchant Marine Academy

Costs of a Service Academy Education

- Service obligation following graduation
- Heavy workload
- Highly regimented
- Restricted social life

It's not for everybody, but for the right student, it's a world-changing opportunity!

The Academies*

- United States Military Academy (West Point, New York)
- United States Naval Academy (Annapolis, Maryland)
- United States Coast Guard Academy (New London, Connecticut)
- United States Merchant Marine Academy (King's Point, New York)
- United States Air Force Academy (Colorado Springs, Colorado)

* in order of founding



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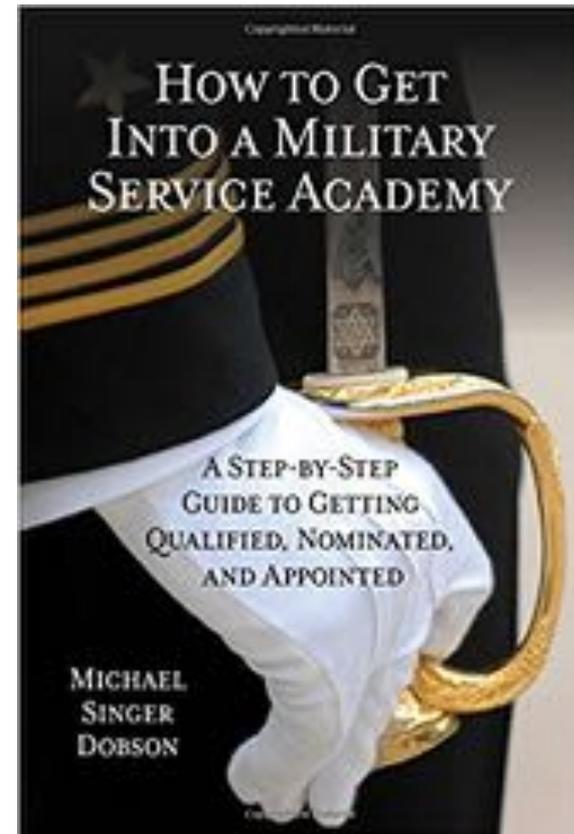
Preparing for Admission

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Basic Qualifications

- Excellent academic record
- High test scores (SAT/ACT)
- Physical fitness and athletic prowess
- Extracurricular/community activities
- Demonstrated peer leadership
- Congressional or other nomination*

* except Coast Guard Academy



The “Whole Person” Evaluation Process

- Academies want well-rounded applicants
- Candidates must meet minimum standards in all categories
- Prefer items that can be counted or measured
- Use a point system to rank candidates

Some Statistics

- 95% of accepted students have at least a 3.0; 30% have weighted GPA exceeding 4.0.
- 70% are in the top 20% of their classes.
- 10% were valedictorians or salutatorians
- 60% were members of a national honor society
- 80% earned a varsity letter
- 60% were captains of an athletic team
- 69% held student offices

What Courses Should You Take?

English	Math	Foreign Language	Laboratory Science	History/Social Studies	Other
<p>4 years, emphasis on composition, grammar, literature, and speech.</p> <p>If there's a college prep course in writing, take it (USAFA).</p>	<p>4 years, including algebra, geometry, intermediate algebra, and trigonometry.</p> <p>Take precalculus and calculus if available.</p>	<p>2 years.</p> <p>(USAFA specifies "modern," USMMA does not require a foreign language)</p>	<p>2 years (West Point/Navy), 4 years (Air Force).</p> <p>Chemistry and physics required by Navy; plus biology at USAFA.</p>	<p>1 year US history (West Point), plus 1 year world or European history (Navy); 3 years total (USAFA), including geography, government, and economics.</p>	<p>If available, basic computing. USMMA also likes mechanical drawing, machine shop, business and economics, and engineering</p>

Show Leadership and Get Involved

- Varsity sports
- Student government
- Clubs
- Dramatics, public speaking, debate
- Publications
- Tutoring
- Club leadership (also starting your own club)
- Scouting/Sea Cadets/Civil Air Patrol
- JROTC (if offered)
- Community service
- Government internships/volunteer activities
- Churches and religious groups
- Charity work
- Environment/social services
- Veteran support
- Volunteer fire/EMS
- Travel and adventure
- Summer courses
- College courses/continuing education
- Jobs
- Create your own adventure!

Two Important Activities

ACADEMY SUMMER PROGRAM

- Offered by all academies the summer between junior & senior year.
- Highly competitive; limited admission.
- Apply as part of your preliminary application
- It's good if you get in, but not fatal if you don't

BOYS/GIRLS STATE

- Must be nominated by an American Legion chapter
- Week-long program between junior & senior year
- Leadership roles are highly valued
- If you can only go to one, go to Boys/Girls State

Testing Requirements

- Either the SAT or ACT is acceptable
- If ACT, writing portion is mandatory
- Academies **superscore** test results, so take them as often as possible
- If you haven't yet taken SAT or ACT, the PSAT/NMSQT is acceptable for preliminary evaluation
- No other standardized tests are required, but do submit high AP scores (4 or 5)

Average Test Scores of Admitted Candidates

	West Point	Navy	Coast Guard	Merchant Marine	Air Force
SAT	627 Reading 645 Math 608 Writing	600-650 Verbal 630-680 Math	575-675 Verbal 600-675 Math	632 Reading 626 Math	642 Verbal 669 Math
ACT English/Math	29/29	(Not reported)	(Not reported)	(Not reported)	30/30
ACT Science/Reading/Writing	28/30/28	(Not reported)	(Not reported)	(Not reported)	30/30/29



The Admissions Process

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The Admissions Process

- Open **preliminary application**
- Contact your regional **admissions team** member
- Complete all items on your **Candidate Portal**
- Arrange for all necessary **documents**, such as recommendations and transcripts, to be submitted
- Arrange for your **Candidate Fitness Assessment**
- Complete **medical clearance** process (DoDMERB)
- Apply for **nominations***

* except Coast Guard Academy

Preliminary Application

- Start the online application through your “candidate portal,” available through the website of each academy*
- Earliest date to start application is the second semester of your junior year (check website for dates). *Mark all important dates in your calendar!*
- The preliminary application also serves as your application for the academy summer program.
- The preliminary application is evaluated before you’re allowed to continue. If you’re not competitive, you’re finished for the year.

* Merchant Marine also accepts paper applications.

Your Academy Admissions Team

- Each academy has local part-time representatives that are part of the admissions team:
 - West Point: Field Force Representative
 - Navy: Blue & Gold Officer
 - Coast Guard: Academy Admissions Partner
 - Merchant Marine: Local Admission Field Representative
 - Air Force: Academy Liaison Officer (ALO)

Admissions Team (con't)

- Find your local representative through the academy websites.
- Get in touch with them early and work with them — they're very important.
- There are also regional directors of admissions who work at the academies. Contact them when the local representative won't do.
- If applicable, contact academy diversity offices or athletic departments for more help.

The Candidate Portal

- The primary communications tool throughout the admissions process is your Candidate Portal.
- You get access to your Candidate Portal when you pass the initial evaluation/assessment.
- Everything on your portal must be complete for you to be admitted!
- Depending on your situation, additional items may show up.
- Check your portal regularly — at least once a week!

Documentation

- The Candidate Portal lists all documentation required
- You *must* get references from specific teachers and employers (though you can submit additional ones)
- Some material will be uploaded to your portal by others — but you are still responsible for getting it done!

Candidate Fitness Assessment (CFA)

How the CFA Works

- All candidates must take the CFA (the same one can be used for multiple academies).
- The CFA can be administered by PE teachers, among others.
- Candidates must make their own arrangements, including location (a school gym is appropriate)
- Prepare, prepare, prepare — even if you're very fit!
- The test is pass/fail for *each one*

What's on the CFA?

- Basketball throw
- Pull-ups (women may do flexed-arm hang instead)
- Shuttle run
- Modified sit-ups (crunches)
- Push-ups
- One mile run

Maximums and averages are provided for each event. There are minimums for each one, but you aren't told what they are!

Medical Clearance (DoDMERB)

- All candidates must go through a comprehensive medical evaluation administered by the Department of Defense Medical Evaluation Review Board (DoDMERB)
- Academies don't schedule your evaluation until they've decided you're competitive
- You are notified through your candidate portal
- Results are provided on the candidate portal and the DoDMERB website

Medical Clearance (continued)

- Outcomes:
 - Qualified
 - Disqualified
 - Remedial
- *Remedial* means more tests/documentation needed
- *Disqualified* means the academy will automatically consider you for a *waiver*
- The academies can *waive* a disqualification and admit you anyway
- Each academy makes its own decision
- You are automatically considered for a waiver; you don't have to ask for it
- Even if you're Qualified, you must notify DoDMERB if your health changes

Medical Red Flags

How to Manage the Process

- Medical “red flags” aren’t necessarily disqualifying.
- If you have one, get your medical records organized and if possible arrange for your own pre-tests.
- Time is of the essence! Respond quickly to all inquiries.

Medical Red Flags

- Asthma, seasonal allergies, inhaler use
- Learning disabilities/ADHD
- Vision (glasses OK for the most part)
- Surgery, concussions, head injuries
- Conditions requiring regular medication

Other Medical Issues

- Drug and alcohol use (minor use not disqualifying; lying about it is a very bad idea)
- Tattoos, brands, piercings, body modifications (check service standards)
- Height and weight (each service has minimum and maximum requirements, and they vary)



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Getting Nominated

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The Nominations Process

- You need a **nomination*** and an **appointment** to be admitted to an academy
- There are multiple sources of nominations; apply to every one for which you're eligible
- While a nomination is an absolute requirement for admission, it's not as terrifying as it seems

* except Coast Guard Academy

Sources of Nominations

Everyone can apply

- Your Member of Congress (or delegate in certain US territories)
- Both Senators in your state
- The Vice President* (sign up on the V-P's website; the academies actually make the choices)

* not for Merchant Marine Academy

Limited to eligible applicants

- Presidential nominations
 - Children of wounded, killed, or missing veterans
 - Children of active duty or retired military personnel
 - Children of Medal of Honor winners
- Current members of the military or the reserves
- JROTC/ROTC Honor Units with Distinction

“Nomination” vs. Nomination

- Most members of Congress award ten “nominations” to each academy per year
- They actually have only 1-2 nomination “slots” that can be filled
- Everyone on the list, however, is considered to have been “nominated”
- If you don’t “win your district,” you are considered for additional nominations automatically

Nominations You Can't Apply For

- There are several categories of nominations that are administered by the academies
- You normally need to be on a Congressional list to be considered for them
- Additional Nomination Sources
 - Service Secretary Nominations for Qualified Alternates
 - Superintendent's Nominations
 - Remaining Vacancy Nominations
 - National Waiting List (for those who decline admission or drop out before entering)

Congressional Nominations

- Locate “Service Academy Nominations” on the website for your member of Congress and both senators for your state
 - Download and review all forms and instructions
 - Each member runs the process differently
 - The process is run by staff members. You may or may not actually meet the Congress member
 - Watch your deadlines!
- Normal steps in the process
 - SAT/ACT scores
(Congressional offices have numbers, just like colleges)
 - Essays (one or more)
 - Interview by a board
 - Selection/nomination

Your senators and members of Congress coordinate to avoid duplication — you’ll only get one nomination, even if they all love you!



Special Issues and Concerns

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Recruited Athletes

- Athletes must meet all other requirements, including nominations
- Everyone gets free tuition and room & board; there are no special benefits
- If the Athletic Department wants you, they will serve as your advocates and coaches through the process
- Check the recruiting section on the sports page for each academy for details on how to apply

Diversity and Overcoming Challenges

Economically Disadvantaged/Hardship Candidates

- Overcoming hardship or disadvantage is a leadership skill
- Talk with trusted adults who know your situation
- Inform your academy liaison
- You are automatically considered for the academy “prep school” if needed

Diversity Recruiting

- The services need a diverse officer corps and actively seek diversity candidates
- Check academy websites for their diversity outreach programs

Other Special Issues

- **Homeschooled or non-traditional education students** — download the PDF at <http://tinyurl.com/ldlmatb>.
- **Drug and alcohol use** — minor use not disqualifying; lying about it is.
- **Encounters with law enforcement** — varies by offense; they *will* check
- **School problems** — the biggest issue is what you learned from it

“One instance of bad judgment shouldn’t ruin your entire life. The question we have is what you did with that experience. Has it caused you to change your life in a significant way? Tell us about that.”

Col. Deborah McDonald

Director of Admissions, United States Military Academy at West Point



Final Steps, Tips, and Resources

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Final Steps

- Check your candidate portal frequently to make sure all lights are green! New items are sometimes added by the academies. Acceptances and rejection will be on the portal.
- Visit the academy if at all possible. Some allow overnight visits in the dorms
- If you get a Letter of Assurance (LOA) or Letter of Encouragement (LOE), it's a great sign, but not a guarantee. If you don't get one, don't worry. Most don't.
- None of the academies offers early decision; Coast Guard offers early action. Navy and Merchant Marine use rolling admissions.
- Acceptances begin in November (not many), with most in February. Waiting list offers can come only weeks before reporting in!
- If you don't get in, there's always next year. Some candidates have tried two or three times before being successful — plus, enthusiasm and desire help!

After Acceptance

- **Security Clearance:** “Secret” clearance required of all candidate. Keep your SF 86; you’ll have to update it every time your clearance changes or need to be renewed
- **Shoes and Boots** (they need to be broken in, so you get them before the rest of your uniform)
- **Money Issues:** Bank account, direct deposit authorization, and initial deposit to your cadet account (all cadets except Merchant Marine get a salary)
- **Travel Arrangements/Packing List** (pack exactly what they tell you; no more and no less)
- **Reporting-in day** is very stressful — there are YouTube videos that demystify the process a bit
- Keep up your **physical fitness** regimen — but don’t have an accident!

A Few Final Tips

- Start early — the earlier, the better!.
- Make sure it's what *you* want, not your parents or others.
- Develop great time management and study habits early.
- Don't worry if extracurricular activities aren't military in nature
- Organize your application. (You won't believe how much paperwork there is.)
- Talk to academy alumni

Resources and Contact Information

There are a great many resources available for prospective academy candidates. Begin with the official admissions website for each academy. See your librarian or favorite bookseller for books on life at the academies. YouTube has videos on reporting in, preparing for the CFA, and many other subjects.

My own work on the subject can be found below. Please feel free to contact me if you have specific questions.

- *How to Get Into a Military Service Academy*, Michael Dobson
- Website and Contact Info: <http://tinyurl.com/lnyz8rt>, or michael@dobsonolutions.com

“Many of our nation's great leaders began their careers at a service academy. I encourage anyone interested in a rewarding college experience or military career to apply as soon as possible.”

Chris Cannon, member of Congress

“There's no doubt West Point impacted who I am... It has an enormous emphasis, not only on military aspects, but character development. Whether it's the honor code, or the interactions you have, both with the cadet leadership and the academy leadership, every place you are is a character test.”

Mike Pompeo, director CIA