



# Leadership & Character at the United States Air Force Academy

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## Abstract

The military has a distinctive national reputation for the competence and personal and professional character of its leaders. The vision and mission of the Air Force Academy substantively support sustaining this reputation by developing leaders of character prepared to lead the nation. To execute its mission, this Academy carefully combines the teaching of leadership and character with practice, and promotes a synergy between education and practice and the domains of leadership and character across a 47-month experience. This requires a deliberate effort across mission elements, with this joint effort serving identified institutional outcomes that require both strong character and leadership competencies. The processes involved in leadership and character development are described.

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A recent National Leadership Index showed that American citizens were more confident in the leadership of the military than any other professional and governmental bodies, had the most confidence in the competence of the military leaders, and rated military leader's professional and personal character higher than these other bodies as well (Pittinsky, Rosenthal, Welle, & Montoya, 2005). These findings reflect an often stated observation that the military is held to a high standard. Achieving and maintaining such a standard requires deliberate effort, including strong socialization and developmental programs at the service academies. This is well recognized in the Air Force and at the Air Force Academy, where a deliberate 47-month experience is delivered to maintain this high standard.

There are two guiding principles that are fundamental to the United States Air Force Academy (USAFA): its mission and vision. The mission of USAFA is to educate, train, and inspire men and women to become officers of character, motivated to lead the United States Air Force in service to our nation. The vision of USAFA is to be the Air Force's premier institution for developing leaders of character. Inherent in these two statements is the expectation of developing intelligent, competent leaders whose actions are informed and guided by their character. As stated in *The Armed Forces Officer* (Department of Defense), "the officer must have strength of character—the ability to keep one's head at times of exceptional stress and violent emotion." This requires, according to Clausewitz, "...first, an intellect that, even in the darkest hour, retains some glimmerings of the inner light which leads to truth; and second, the courage to follow this faint light wherever it may lead" (p. 26). In order

to meet such a goal, the entire USAFA experience is designed to facilitate growth in both leadership and character. This is done through an academic and experiential process that progressively increases in responsibility and scope as a cadet progresses through USAFA.

A useful way to look at this process is through the framework offered by Lindsay and Sanders (2009), which integrates both character and leadership into the developmental process (see Figure 1). This framework, while relatively straightforward in its representation, offers clarity for identifying how both education and experience can be applied to the development of leaders of character. It uses a scientist-practitioner model for each of the domains of leadership and character, maintaining that both formal learning and experience jointly contribute to officership. The benefit of such a framework is that it provides a mechanism by which both disciplines can be examined in relation to one another, particularly in terms of the interaction of leadership and character. The approach at USAFA is to provide both the scholarship and the practice within the domains of character and leadership. This arduous task is accomplished by the many different organizations--mission elements--across the institution. The purpose of this paper is to highlight, according to the framework, how this is done. We will do this by first addressing leadership scholarship and experience and then detail how this is done with respect to character. Finally, we will bring these two domains together by addressing their integration.

### Teaching Leadership

With the charter of the Air Force Academy geared toward developing leaders of character, there is a fundamental and critical assumption



that leadership can be learned. Clearly there are multiple pathways to learning, including learning that occurs in a formal classroom environment. Although traditional classrooms have been criticized for not being the most potent platforms for developing leadership capabilities (e.g., McCall, 2010), the leadership classroom at the Academy is not a traditional educational experience. In fact, it differs in substantial ways. First, it is not a compressed seminar, but a curriculum that is distributed over 15 weeks. Second, the leadership classroom is supplemented by a “lab” opportunity, since cadets actually apply and practice leadership throughout their 47-month experience at the Academy. Third, the class includes case studies, personal evaluations, and experiential activities that result in deeper learning than large, lecture-based approaches to teaching.

While opportunities to teach leadership occur across the Academy, from any of the “fields of friendly strife” to the flightline to the dormitories, the formal teaching of leadership classes is largely provided through the Dean of the Faculty and specific academic departments. In particular, it is the Department of Behavioral Sciences and Leadership (DFBL) that is charged with providing this academic component to the development of individual leadership.

DFBL teaches leadership at three levels. First, the department offers a core leadership class that is completed by all cadets during their junior year. Next, there are leadership electives that are optional to cadets and represent a leadership concentration within the broader behavioral sciences major. Finally, as part of a Master’s degree program for selected Commanders, the department offers three leadership courses. All of the courses reflect a consistent philosophy and set of assumptions

regarding the capacity to learn leadership, a hierarchy of leadership competencies (e.g., Hogan & Kaiser, 2005), and the ability to learn specific competencies that prepare leaders-in-training for later leadership success (Jackson & Lindsay, 2010). One key assumption is that self-awareness is a significant competency that undergirds leadership effectiveness. Therefore, personal assessment, self-evaluation, and reflective learning processes are used to promote self-understanding and enhance the learning experience. Self-awareness may be a critically important component of effective leadership, but clearly more abilities are required than just self-knowledge. As Day (2000) has articulated, leaders should possess both human capital and social capital, and these can work synergistically to enable high performance at all levels, including the capacity to lead teams and organizations. Student leaders will not practice at these levels until later in their careers, but early presentation of such material not only provides a clear leadership framework, it can also operate as a priming mechanism supporting vicarious learning. This approach guides and aligns the teaching of leadership at the three levels previously identified.

Since every graduate of the Air Force Academy is expected to be a leader, it is axiomatic that every cadet should participate in at least one leadership course. At USAFA, this course is Foundations of Leadership Development (Beh Sci 310). It is a core academic course tailored for all cadets in their junior year, intentionally targeting this specific level since this is the time when these cadets are transitioning into leadership roles in their respective Squadrons and throughout the Wing. Consistent with this timing, the course has the specific goals to: 1) grasp the essential behavioral science and leadership concepts that



are fundamental to leadership development and effectiveness; 2) provide tools and amplify cadets' ability to recognize, interpret, and analyze various leadership situations, and 3) bolster cadet's ability and commitment to facilitate their own leadership development. Beh Sci 310 effectively meets these three goals through relevant academic theory and ample opportunity to apply this theory to numerous cadet and Air Force leadership examples. Specific course content includes principles of leader development, characteristics of effective/toxic leaders, communication, transformational leadership, ethics in leadership, followership, groups and teams, and organizational leadership and change.

There is deliberate alignment between these three objectives, the institutional outcomes, and the specific lessons in the course. Some of the 19 USAFA outcomes include ethical reasoning and action, service to the nation, skills in communication, critical thinking, decision-making, and teamwork, and knowledge of ethics and the foundations of character. These outcomes are embedded in the course materials as evidenced by readings and lessons on these topics from military leaders and world renowned scholars. Additionally, the course emphasizes the outcomes of Respect for Human Dignity and Lifelong Development and Contributions. At the most basic level, Respect for Human Dignity is fundamental to effective leadership. As leaders of character, it is essential that cadet's understand and respect those whom they will lead. In addition, fundamental to the course is the notion that leadership is something that can be developed and that it is a process that takes place over time. Therefore, a cadet's journey toward lifelong development in leadership is enhanced through this course. In part, this is

accomplished by orienting lessons to levels of leadership or the leadership pipeline—leading self, leading others, and leading managers (Drotter & Charan, 2001). These emphases and alignments with the course material support institutional coherence and represent significant benchmarks to the Air Force's leadership doctrine, institutional competencies, and other published standards of leader characteristics.

The scope and complexity of this course requires a large cadre of qualified instructors. This is orchestrated through a Course Director system, in which a Course Director, a senior military officer or civilian with a PhD in leadership or a related field, supervises over 15 military and civilian instructors. The majority of other instructors that teach this course are hand-picked based on their academic credentials (e.g., degrees in leadership) and/or extensive leadership experience (e.g., previous squadron commander). This depth and breadth of knowledge and experience is necessary since the course is not lecture-based course, but relies on class discussion and interaction. This style of academic delivery requires that the instructors really know the material, are comfortable in the classroom, and are familiar with the cadet experience. In addition to DFBL instructors/professors, a limited number of Air Officer Commanding's (AOCs) are used as instructors in the course. These AOCs are volunteers and are hand screened to teach in the course. This has been a valuable asset to Beh Sci 310 as it provides an important operational perspective to the course, due to the AOCs role in the Commandant of Cadets' mission element.

The second level of formal leadership education within DFBL consists of elective courses. Currently there are four additional course offerings in leadership, Groups and Teams, Individual



and Organizational Assessment and Leadership, Advanced Leadership, and Advanced Topics in Leadership. These courses follow the same general philosophy and approach, but obviously their scope is more specific. The topics either expand and broaden those in the core course or are addressed with greater focus and depth, consistent with the course emphasis. It should be noted that DFBL is not the only department that teaches courses related to leadership. While it is the only department that has a required leadership course for all cadets, there are at least three other departments that address leadership topics. Perhaps the department with the most breadth in addressing leadership issues would be the Management Department, which has two courses on Human Managerial Systems and a course on Management and Command. The Department of History offers a course on the History of Military Thought, and the Department of English provides a course for all cadets titled Language, Literature, and Leadership. It should be noted that leadership is also taught in multiple lessons in Cadet Professional Military Education provided through the Commandant of Cadets. These lessons address a wide range of topical leadership issues and are intended to prepare each cadet class for current duties and their next level of leadership responsibility.

The third level of formal leadership instruction provided by DFBL targets commanders (i.e., Air Force Majors who will become leaders of cadet squadrons) rather than cadets directly. An important objective of this course of instruction is to prepare these squadron commanders to be quintessential leaders and role models, thereby making them great examples and mentors for cadets to follow. In some ways this is a train-the-trainer approach with a one-year Master's degree

in counseling and education providing the critical academic background so these commanders can effectively develop cadets. The Master's degree is steeped in a developmental orientation as it serves as both a robust leadership development program and as an advanced academic degree to help these commanders frame, understand, and teach cadets about leadership (see Hassan, Jackson, & Jordan, 2009). The program weaves academic and developmental information and experiences together such that graduates have enhanced knowledge and skills in human and social capital. They are expected to be both "book smart" and "street smart" in terms of leadership, and capable of applying honed capabilities to model and deliver organizational results in the form of squadron performance. Additionally, they should demonstrate their commitment to lifelong learning and, most critically, apply their talents to develop subordinates. In support of this, their leadership curriculum includes coursework on characteristics of effective leaders, leader and leadership development, leading at different levels, coaching, group dynamics, leading diversity, and student development. Although this program enrolls only about 20 officers per year, the impact of the Air Officer Commanding is felt across this Academy since each AOC leads over 120 cadets.

The general teaching of leadership is practiced in virtually every venue of the Air Force Academy, but the formalized and core instruction is primarily resident within DFBL. This instruction is consistently aligned with the broader Academy outcomes and mission. It is congruent with and guided by both appropriate Air Force doctrine and the discipline of leadership found in scholarly publications.

### Practicing Leadership



There is no doubt that the opportunity to perform in a leadership position contributes significantly to the development of leadership skills. Whether this practice occurs through successfully navigating challenging assignments (e.g., Day, 2000) or struggling as a result of hardship (e.g., Moxley & Pulley, 2004), there is educational value derived from actually “doing” leadership. One of the distinctive strengths of the service academies, to include the Air Force Academy, is that the curriculum not only includes academic courses, but also complementary “lab experiences” to promote leader development. These experiences occur throughout a cadets’ time at the Academy, and the responsibilities are progressive over a four year span. In many ways the nature of these leader development expectations represent the Academy as somewhat of a work-study program that also follows an apprenticeship model. That is, cadets are expected to balance time across numerous Academy experiences that include academic training and military job performance. These military positions expand in scope, to the point where senior level cadets will lead flights, squadrons, groups, or the entire cadet wing. Further, there are opportunities to assume such positions throughout the year. During the year, these positions include both on-the-job training and performance requirements. Thus, there are unit goals to be achieved by using objectives, standards, and procedures, and there are leadership development objectives supported by the use of hierarchical supervision, mentoring, coaching, and feedback. Within the academic year these leadership experiences range from one-on-one training to leading team activities to directing wing-wide major training events, all of which are graded or scored in some fashion. These academic year opportunities also include leadership positions in aviation programs, particularly the parachuting

programs and introductory flight training in the soaring program, where cadets lead, train, develop, and evaluate other cadets. Additionally, there are opportunities to lead within a wide variety of clubs, and of course there are leadership positions, formal and informal, on athletic teams from the collegiate to the intramural level.

The leadership opportunities are expanded during the summer sessions. A major leadership opportunity, and training requirement, is to participate in Basic Cadet Training, the indoctrination and preparation/training program for incoming cadets. There are numerous other cadre leadership positions, to include Global Engagement cadre (leading cadets in a simulated deployment), Field Engineering and Readiness Lab Leadership and Engineering and Construction Camp Cadre (where cadets other cadets in hands-on civil engineering/construction activities), and AETIC Leadership (where cadets assist Military Training Instructors for the Air Force’s Basic Training).

Some of these leadership experiences have a more limited scope or a more passive nature. For example, serving as a classroom leader, a section marcher, includes some degree of accountability and responsibility for classmates, but usually a cadet is a section marcher for a single course (and there aren’t enough courses for all cadets to fulfill this role). Other programs, such as Operation Air Force and Language and Cultural Immersion Programs provide exposure to leadership, but most cadets are observing rather than participating in leadership roles during these experiences (and the goals of these programs are not to have direct leadership roles). Nonetheless, there is both a constant exposure to and expectation for leadership and leadership development.





In summary, leadership is a multifaceted construct and, therefore, the responsibility for developing leadership does not fall with one program or one academic department. It is possible only through a carefully constructed process that leverages all of the strengths and resources that are present at USAFA. While different mission elements have the responsibility for managing the specific pieces of this leadership development, it is only through the synergy that is developed through a systematic and aligned development process across all parts of USAFA that this is possible.

### Teaching Character

The teaching of character is fraught with some of the same challenges and criticisms as the teaching of leadership—“it can’t be learned from a book.” This conclusion, however, seems over-generalized. Consider for example, the model of morality proposed by Lickona (1997; 1996) that includes moral knowing. Moral knowing is a cognitive component, and certainly students can be taught to engage in critical thinking processes and to acquire a critical fund of knowledge regarding character and moral matters.

For years, formal character education at the Air Force Academy was largely focused on the Honor Code. Understandably this is a critical emphasis and corresponds to the Air Force core value of “Integrity First.” However, character is not unidimensional. Therefore, there has been a progressive extension of character programs to reflect the breadth of qualities that relate to character. Further, in 2009 the Center for Character Development formally recognized the linkage between character and leadership, accordingly expanding to become the Center for Character and Leadership Development (CCLD).

Even so, Honor Education is still the bedrock and foundation of character education at the Academy.

Honor education continues to be very extensive. In Basic Cadet Training (BCT), basic cadets are given several hours of honor lessons covering the spectrum from the letter of the code (“Cadets will not lie, steal or cheat or tolerate those who do”) to the spirit of the code (e.g., being honest, respecting people’s property, turning in their own original work, etc). This training continues throughout their four years; the frequency of training decreases but the sophistication increases as a cadet grows under the code. In addition, cadets in BCT are given four lessons covering the three Core Values: Integrity First, Service Before Self, and Excellence in All We Do. This is part of a comprehensive process for assimilating the Air Force culture. It ensures new cadets understand what the core values mean and begin to embrace them in their daily lives.

Supplementing this initial training, currently all cadets have a graduation requirement to attend five, day-long seminars which focus on various emphases in their character development journey. These seminars share two closely linked concepts that provide focus for the seminar structure: symbolism and making the experience memorable. Symbolism is important to show the various representations of character in the Air Force. Further, it supports the institutional priority that character is the most important trait an Academy graduate must have. Given this priority, cadets have to see its importance running through all aspects of the seminar experience. As a result, there are several seminar imperatives. The material has to be leading edge, directly relevant, and immediately applicable. In addition, the staff supporting them has to be experienced and



passionate about what they do, and leadership and other mission elements across the Academy must openly support cadet participation. Furthermore, it is important that cadets see forthright volunteer facilitators with extensive professional expertise and robust backgrounds who sacrifice their time to speak into cadets' lives and ensure the Academy accomplishes its mission of developing leaders of character—cadets have to be in contact with those actively practicing the core values.

While the broad objective of these seminars is to develop leaders of character, there are also specific outcomes that directly map onto four of the Academy's 19 institutional outcomes for all graduates. All the seminars tie directly into the development of at least four of those, with the four common outcomes represented by moral courage, respect for human dignity, ethical foundations of character, and ethical reasoning in action. In each of the five seminars, these four outcome characteristics are addressed at a level that is relevant to a cadet's class year and deliberately woven into the lesson material. The tailored use of videos, case studies, personal stories and activities integrated with the intimate facilitator-cadet interaction helps cadets explore the realities of the topics and to get an authentic look from the "front lines of character." This monumental effort to customize lessons to seminars and relate every cadet activity to one of the institutional outcomes may be the only one of its kind at a college or university. Further, the connection to specific outcomes creates an opportunity to better assess the seminars' effectiveness and measure improvements in a cadet's character from entry till graduation.

The seminar philosophy is based on a progressive competency model (e.g., Hogan & Kaiser, 2005)

known at USAFA as the "PITO" leadership model, which highlights personal, interpersonal, team and organizational leadership. Each type of leadership is progressively addressed and highlighted in that succession from freshman through senior year. Thus, the curriculum in the seminars is designed to meet a cadet where they are best ready to receive it and most able to utilize it. This way each seminar builds upon the previous years' material. During their first year, cadets are given extremely demanding requirements with military, academic and athletic duties. We try to help them gain some personal awareness and perspective on why they came here and the greater purposes and values that the profession of arms entails. Essentially, we attempt to help them lay the foundation for a successful journey at the Academy and in the military. This begins with making personal leadership choices (i.e., leading oneself). In their sophomore year, the seminar focus shifts to interpersonal leadership and the topics help equip them deal more effectively with their roommate, their teammates, their squadron, and their chain of command. In their junior year, cadets become small unit and team leaders and captains, so the team aspect of leadership is emphasized through the lens of servant leadership. In the final year, the seminars culminate with an organizational focus on ethical decision-making which connects a cadet to their soon to be lieutenant reality.

A true seminar format is used for all five of the character seminars. Class sizes range from 50-60 cadets. Although this may seem like a large number, the groups are actually broken down into much smaller groups (8 – 10 cadets), each having a designated facilitator or two. During the first year freshman cadets attend two seminars. The first, Vital Effective Character Through Observation and





Reflection (VECTOR), as the acronym implies, focuses on the direction—obtaining the right bearing for the fundamental features of an officer's values and actions. VECTOR focuses on four main areas: values, purpose, vision and influence, all at the personal level in the PITO model. This seminar explores who a cadet is, what drives them, where they see themselves headed, and how they will impact others. Appropriately, the main goal of the seminar is to mobilize them with a more deliberate direction, energized to make a positive impact.

Freshmen also attend the Respect and Responsibility seminar (R & R). R & R begins the transition from personal and interpersonal leadership. Cadets complete a personality and leadership style self-assessment, the DISC, which allows some clear definition of a cadet's preferences in how they lead, like to be led and generally like to interact in a given environment. This helps cadets learn what they bring to the table, what blind spots work against them, and how they can take a challenging person or situation and approach either more effectively. With self and other awareness as a foundation, cadets then explore the area of interpersonal micro-aggressions and other subtle but high impact diversity issues. The goal is for a cadet to possess a heightened awareness of the many interpersonal challenges that exist and some very practical tools they can use to address the multitude of issues they face in the cadet wing and in the future as an officer.

For their sophomore year, cadets participate in the Responsible Officer Performance Enhancement Seminar (ROPES). Unlike the other four seminars, ROPES takes place outdoors at the Adventure Based Learning Course (ABL). ABL is an obstacle course with events ranging from low

to the ground group challenges to 70-foot towers that can only be accessed with technical ropes and harnesses. This experiential learning model gives cadets a chance to use many of the interpersonal skills they have acquired in previous seminars and take them to another level in small group dynamics where proper communication, trust and respect are all paramount. These events are simulations or workplace metaphors for real life interpersonal problems as they draw upon problem-solving skills, trust, communication abilities, and moral courage in accomplishing team tasks the right way.

The Leader in Flight Today (LIFT) seminar uses servant leadership to explore team leadership; a timely topic for these cadets who are now assigned to more significant leadership positions during their junior year. A case study method, videos, and interactions are used as vehicles to learn about team dynamics. The seminar closes with a guest presenter who ties in all the lessons from the day with a discussion how being a servant leader can produce results for individuals and for the team.

The Academy Character Enrichment Seminar (ACES) is the capstone seminar event for seniors—firstclass cadets. ACES targets the organizational impacts of decision-making and emphasizes the ethical decision-making process in one's personal life and in the fog and friction of combat operations. The seminar includes a mentoring emphasis as facilitators and senior leaders share and discuss real life ethical dilemmas encountered in their careers.

Honor Education, Core Values and the five seminars continue to be the critical pieces CCLD orchestrates and partners with all mission elements in providing meaningful character education opportunities over a cadet's four year career at



the Academy. Over 1000 guest observers and facilitators from all USAFA mission elements and organizations participate through approximately 150 seminar sessions each year. This participation and integration are key to accomplishing the USAFA mission, and the seminars are an ideal opportunity to drive character education deep into USAFA culture.

### Practicing character

Character is frequently thought of as habitual behavior, so it is important in the development of leaders of character to provide opportunities to test and practice the specific behaviors that lead to habits. Certainly the Air Force Academy provides many opportunities for practice, with the idea that such practice leads to the right lifelong habits that will well represent all of the Air Force. Arguably the Academy creates these opportunities in two ways, first by setting conditions that prime and challenge character opportunities, and second, through chain of command intervention and feedback.

As noted, the Academy has requirements in multiple domains. Academic, military, and athletic areas are primary performance dimensions, but cadets have a host of requirements described in the institution's Cadet Sight Picture and sets of formal instructions, as well as the requirements that come from living with 4,000 other people and ancillary experiences like clubs, aviation activities, and the range of experiences within one's personal life. Separately, these requirements create a host of character related practice opportunities in the general sense of doing the right thing. When combined, the intensity of the requirements is magnified as cadets must sort through competing priorities, perform in areas in which they may not

have natural aptitude, sustain performance despite fatigue and/or distraction, and simultaneously show good bearing and decorum. Such conditions provide challenges that are sometimes faced for the first time—"should I cut corners", "if I do 'x', who will know", "if I give my best effort in one area will I then falter in another", "how do I keep from getting grades below my usual level of performance?" Thus, cadets practice character and have to execute character-based decisions quite frequently every day. Some must run on the marble strips, be in the right uniform always, attend one class even if behind in homework on another, maintain composure when frustrated, and all in some way, must lead by example in a very visible environment. Furthermore, the stakes are often high as some performance evaluation, a grade or score, a military rating, a check ride, or career assignment, hangs in the balance. Thus, there is no shortage of opportunities and high intensity in terms of the conditions surrounding the practice of character.

What may distinguish USAFA from other developmental programs is embedded in the idea of practice. On the one hand, practice suggests opportunity. However, merely providing opportunity lacks a systematized approach to really profit from practice. Used here, practice implies repeated trials, systematized opportunities to get better and to get it right. Sometimes "practice makes perfect" with an on-the-spot intervention and feedback. The military hierarchy frequently ensures the presence of one or more superiors who can readily—yet appropriately—optimize the teachable moment. At other times, the practice performance was so far from standards that more aggressive intervention is required. These situations define an assortment of discipline cases, which can



result from lying, cheating, violating a specific rule, or behaving in such a way to raise questions about military aptitude. In these instances a cadet may be placed on probation with the expectation that with support they can remedy the problem. Whether the basis for probation stemmed from a deficit in ethical reasoning and action, a problem with respect, decision making, stamina, courage, or discipline, there is often a remedial emphasis and associated belief that the cadet will learn, and will learn very effectively from a particular misstep. In this regard, part of the requirement is to practice character—the characteristics—that will promote future success and become habitual.

There are also formal and informal feedback mechanisms that guide the practice of character. Obviously feedback helps performers assess their competency. Informal feedback can be used in a coaching or mentoring situation to provide such information. Additionally, formal feedback provides a structured mechanism for obtaining such information. The USAFA Military Performance Assessment (MPA) system includes character related competencies, certainly at the personal and interpersonal levels. Feedback from the MPA system is provided by the cadet chain of command as well as peers and permanent party members from other mission elements. Thus, cadets have an opportunity to get a good vector regarding their character practices and the feedback can be used to guide future behavior. That said, the Air Force as a whole does not reflect a flourishing feedback culture, and the feedback mechanisms at the Academy are not yet achieving their full potential.

Overall, the opportunity to practice character is rich and the degree and frequency of character challenges are both high. It is certainly tenable to suggest that in a developmental environment

for the military this is an appropriate condition. What it also suggests is that mistakes will be made and these can be managed by self-correction, low level intervention, or in serious cases, more aggressive intervention. All of these challenges and developmental experiences promote the maturation of character.

### **Integration: Leadership and character**

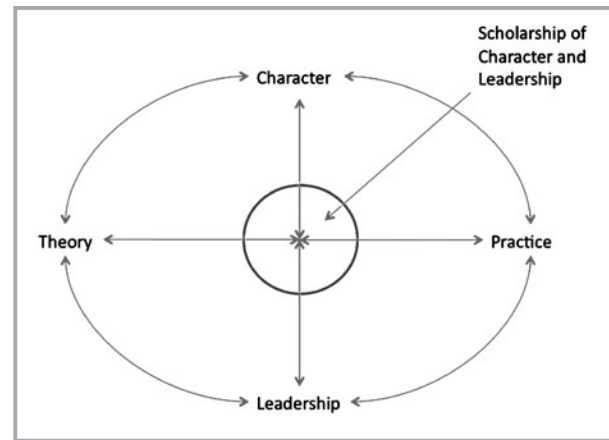
Leadership is often defined as influencing others to accomplish a task, and character is summarily described as doing the right thing. Integrating leadership and character—developing leaders of character—might then be described as getting results in the right way. Clearly this is no small challenge, as many corporate leaders have made headline news in the past several years for getting results doing the wrong thing, and others, far more quietly, have “led” collapsing industries despite doing the right thing. Although there is some disagreement about leadership approaches in the literature (e.g., Hogan & Kaiser, 2005), the most prominent leadership theory—transformational leadership—holds that there must be a moral component to leadership (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; Sendjaya, 2005), and that effective leadership includes this moral component as well as the capacity to create and maintain a successful organization. One way to provide leadership for such organizations, and the Air Force would be one example, is to teach future leaders about both leadership and character and then have them engage in action learning—practice—that applies the academic world to real life situations and subsequently enriches the didactic world with concrete experiences. This is the approach currently taken at the Air Force Academy. In this approach there are noteworthy parallels and consistencies in the assumptions and practices



for developing both leadership and character. The most fundamental is that these capabilities can be learned from fairly traditional educational approaches as well as a variety of experiences and assignments. A core competency critical to developing leaders of character is self-awareness. Knowing oneself continues to be a cornerstone characteristic of a military officer. Additionally, the outcomes of the developmental efforts are tailored to cadets' leadership level, readiness, and need, and importantly, are directly aligned with the Academy's institutional outcomes.

The USAFA approach isn't perfect and it needs to get better. One area that needs expansion, as indicated by the nearly separate treatment of leadership and character in the literature, is the interaction and potential synergy of these two domains. This intersection should be more strongly developed since our future leaders will absolutely need a rich set of leadership and character knowledge, skills, and habits to lead in uncertain times and in unpredictable situations. It is important not only for specific national security interests, but also for the well-being of the populace who will continue to rely on the military for competence in leadership and character.

**Figure 1. Integrative Model of Character and Leader Development (Lindsay & Sanders, 2009)**



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