

OF INTEREST

National Character & Leadership Symposium

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The goals of U.S. Air Force Academy National Character and Leadership Symposium are “*to orient leaders to see themselves and their world differently, to see opportunities for character and leadership development, [and] to emerge from being great people to being great leaders whose decisions and actions will shape a better future.*”

In this inaugural issue of the revitalized *Journal of Character and Leadership Integration*, the editors thought it fitting to offer a brief history of the National Character and Leadership Symposium, the flagship character and leadership-focused event held each year at the Academy’s campus in Colorado Springs. Since NCLS began in 1993, the Academy has hosted students and faculty from over 500 different schools, including civilian colleges and universities, other service academies, Reserve Officer Training Corps detachments, as well as international delegations to join the 4,000-plus cadets who attend each year. Attendees share in presentations and dialog with speakers from the military, business, athletics, entertainment, and humanitarian organizations. By engaging with these exceptional leaders—some older, some younger-NCLS participants have the opportunity to enhance their own personal understanding and motivation across the breadth of character and leadership topics.





The National Character and Leadership Symposium had its roots in a time of trial and tribulation that challenged the U.S. Air Force Academy. In the wake of a series of sexual assault and cheating incidents at the U.S. Air Force Academy in the early 1990s, Lieutenant General Bradley C. Hosmer, the first USAFA graduate to return as Superintendent, created the Center for Character Development on August 1, 1993. Beginning that year, the CCD began offering the Cadet Development Symposium, a one day program that would selectively emphasize one of the Academy's then-eight character development outcomes -- integrity, selfless service, excellence, human dignity, decisiveness, taking responsibility, self-discipline, and spirituality.

By 1997, these day-long events evolved into the National Character and Leadership Symposium, with the inaugural NCLS in 1998 embracing the theme,

“Excellence in All We Do.” In addition to distinguished speakers and events, a special student consortium brought over thirty students from selected civilian and military institutions to USAFA. Paired with Academy cadets, the invited students attended symposium sessions, engaged in small group discussions, and presented position papers at the conclusion of the event, helping to broaden the experience by making it more than simply a cadet-centric event.

Under the new model, NCLS continued to grow, attracting more and more students from outside the Academy to join in dialogue and exchange ideas about nurturing a social climate that fosters and promotes integrity, service, and excellence in all walks of life. By 2000, all four thousand-plus cadets and more than one hundred college students from all around the country were participating in each symposium, benefiting from the words and wisdom of more than thirty nationally recognized speakers who brought their experiences and expertise to bear on character and leadership issues. In addition to attending the symposium events themselves, students continued to offer their own thoughts on personal, character, leadership, ethical conduct and professionalism, contributing papers and original artwork to the NCLS Proceedings published as part of the event. Visiting faculty joined with students and colleagues from other institutions to share and discuss





the best character education practices currently in use at their home institutions.

Each year, NCLS organizers strive to invite a distinguished and diverse group of speakers from a variety of backgrounds to expound on the importance of being a leader of character who lives honorably, lifts others, and elevates the performance of their organization and its people. The result has provided symposium participants the opportunity to hear and interact with a wide range of distinctive and accomplished people such as the most senior leaders from all U.S. and some international military services; Heather Wilson, the first Air Force Academy graduate to have served in the U.S. Congress, outspoken social activist and actor Mike Farrell, F-16 pilot and founder of the Folds of Honor Foundation Major Dan Rooney, and former Enron Corporation Vice President Sherron Watkins who had the courage to alert leadership to accounting irregularities that precipitated the company's collapse. These and many other distinguished speakers--leaders in society, politics, the military, sports, entertainment, education, and humanitarianism--continue to form the core of the annual NCLS speaker panoply.

The NCLS also benefits from the generosity of those who support the further development of character and leadership among the nation's youth through a series

of sponsored events. Each year, the John and Lyn Muse Lecture is supported by John and Lyn Muse Education Foundation and the USAFA Class of 1973, whose energy in part is derived from the large number of Air Force general officers that graduated as members of that class. The Class of 1959—the first to graduate from the Academy--invites Air Force leaders to discuss their path to command in their Leadership Lecture. The Falcon Foundation sponsors the Major General William “Bud” Breckner Lecture, honoring a former fighter pilot, prisoner of war, and friend of the USAFA Cadet Wing who passed away in 2008. NCLS also benefits from the generosity of the Anschutz Foundation, which sponsors the annual Character and Leadership Award; the 2015 selectee was U.S. Veterans Affairs Under Secretary for Benefits Allison Hickey, USAFA Class of 1980. In addition to this award, the Anschutz Foundation also sponsors an annual Scholars' Forum,



which brings together prominent scholars from across the United States and beyond each year just before NCLS to exchange their thoughts and research on the critical character and leadership elements that impact individual and organizational development.

The net result of these collective efforts is a multi-day event that seeks to inform and inspire future generations by challenging them to engage with the world as leaders of character. Through this experience, the Academy and its Center for Character and Leadership Development advance the understanding, practice, and integration of character and leadership development in preparation

for service in the profession of arms. Importantly, they also seek to familiarize others with these ideas and concepts through broad and growing participation—beyond military students and faculty—in the National Character and Leadership Symposium. The opening of the Academy’s new character and leadership development building in late 2015 will bring new possibilities and inspiration to NCLS venues, but the fundamental purpose remains: fruitful exchange between generations of military and civilian thinkers and leaders, benefitting all who participate in this flagship event.

