

“The Air Force’s Academy, producing Lieutenants for our Air Force and our Nation.”



United States Air Force Academy News Release

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News Release # 039
March 14, 2014

STATEMENT FROM ACADEMY SUPERINTENDENT

U.S. AIR FORCE ACADEMY, Colo., – The foundation of the United States Air Force starts at the Air Force’s Academy. This is true whether we are talking about our Core Values, our culture of commitment to the United States, or establishing a climate of respect where all are proud to serve their Nation. There is an ongoing civil liberties debate regarding the free exercise of religion as outlined in the First Amendment of our Constitution. This is a national level debate that happens to be playing out at the United States Air Force Academy. At question is whether the Air Force Academy is infringing upon cadets’ civil right to their free exercise of their religion.

While we swear an oath to Support and Defend the Constitution of the United States, Airmen are also bound by policy established by the Department of Defense and the Air Force, including the guidelines spelled out Air Force Instruction 1-1, Air Force Standards. The Air Force policy is clear but implementation requires thoughtful judgment and careful balance. As Air Force leaders concerned with good order and discipline, we must always ask ourselves whether the actions we take uphold that concept. That is, sometimes we must put the good of the entire unit before the good of any single individual. This is what is meant by one of our Core Values: Service Before Self.

Additionally, we in the military who are charged with the important burden of leadership or command must avoid the actual or apparent use of our position to promote personal, political, religious, or other beliefs to our subordinates or to extend preferential treatment for said beliefs. This circumstance, like many aspects of the entire four-year course of instruction at USAFA and other Service Academies, was used as a strong teaching and learning moment to underline how important it is for service leaders not to allow their private convictions, spiritual beliefs or political positions to become a hindrance to their leadership position of responsibility.

In the specific case at the Air Force Academy, the cadet did not feel that his right to free exercise of religion was infringed upon. His cadet and officer leadership discussed the situation and how it might be perceived by others under his supervision and he removed it.

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U.S. News & World Report’s “America’s Best Colleges 2013” Rankings

#25 National Liberal Arts Colleges, #2 Best Undergraduate-only Business Programs, #2 Aeronautical and Astronautical Engineering, #4 Undergraduate Engineering Program, #7 Mechanical Engineering Program

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What happened here sparked a debate between competing beliefs. One side's perspective of this decision is that elevated one religious faith over all others and that posting scriptures from any religion on cadets' whiteboards creates a hostile environment while the competing viewpoint states that there is censorship, suppression of religion and/or a violation of cadets' constitutional rights. Both sides believe the policy outlined in Air Force Instruction 1-1 was violated.

Our focus at the Air Force's Academy is not on this national debate but on emphasizing our core values and following Department of Defense and Air Force policy and directions as we continue to prepare our cadets to become exceptionally qualified lieutenants who will serve our Nation and defend our freedoms.

Along that line, Secretary James, General Welsh, and Chief Master Sergeant Cody recently issued a message to all Airmen which charged each of us with rededicating ourselves to the Air Force and our Core Values. Secretary James mentioned that it takes tremendous moral courage to live a life of virtue, character, dignity and respect. To be respectful of others means one puts others first. Or in other words, one focuses on the "we," rather than the "I." At USAFA, we take this charge very seriously because we realize we institute the foundation of the United States Air Force in our cadets as they prepare to become officers of character motivated to lead in the United States Air Force in service to our Nation.

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