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AN EXPLANATORY SEQUENTIAL STUDY OF CADET COMMITMENT AT THE
UNITED STATES AIR FORCE ACADEMY

by

Justin Tad Pendry

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

April 2021

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ABSTRACT

Character and leadership are the essence of the United States Air Force Academy (USAFA). USAFA's mission is to develop *leaders of character* responsible for defending this nation. Our country has the most lethal Air Force this world has ever known. The men and women entrusted with protecting its citizens must be committed to the highest standards of ethical leadership. To accomplish this, USAFA provides a robust education and training program with extensive opportunities for cadet development. However, achieving USAFA's vision of creating the nation's best leaders of character relies upon cadet trust in the process and *commitment* to their development into leaders with high character. Although commitment is an instrumental measure for understanding human behavior and a central component of learning organizations, it has never been studied at USAFA.

To fill this gap, this study used an explanatory-sequential design by first employing a survey to quantitatively measure how committed cadets are to their development as leaders of character and to USAFA as an organization and then to determine which factors are associated with commitment variation. The second phase of the study used semistructured interviews to understand commitment antecedents more comprehensively, as well as how and why these variables are related to commitment.

Although commitment research, generally, has focused on outcomes (e.g., performance, job satisfaction, and turnover reduction), understanding the factors that explain variation in commitment-related outcomes is vital to improving organizational effectiveness. The range of cadet commitment to the mission and organization was significant with commitment antecedents at the personal, interpersonal and organizational levels. Expected findings included the prominence of person-fit characteristics, the importance of leadership, and the influence of

organizational subcultures (e.g., squadrons, teams). Key findings included the interrelationship between goals, identity, motivation, and priorities and their impact on commitment; the power of social influence (e.g., cynicism); and how organizational factors (e.g., communication, empowerment, trust, and workload) impact cadet commitment. Emergent findings included the power of perspectives; the decrease in cadet commitment to USAFA over time; the higher level of organizational commitment of female cadets compared to their male counterparts; and an awareness of how COVID-19 can affect commitment.

Keywords: commitment, leadership, character, development, USAF Academy

DEDICATION

This work in its entirety is dedicated to my deceased father, Dale Lee Pendry, who always set the standard for excellence as a son, father, friend, and leader. He was the first member of his family to graduate from college and worked tirelessly to provide opportunities for me, challenge me to be the best version of myself, and encouraged me to believe in myself. As the first member of my family to receive a terminal degree, my hope is that I honor his legacy by being a solid example to my family and friends of what it looks like to be a son, husband, father, friend, and leader of character.

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Ephesians 3:20-21 says, “Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.” I want to thank my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for providing me the opportunity to pursue this doctoral degree over the last three years. It has been more than I could have hoped for or imagined.

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The people we surround ourselves with either raise or lower our standards. They either help us to become the best version of ourselves or encourage us to become lesser versions of ourselves. We become like our friends. No man becomes great on his own. No woman becomes great on her own. The people around them help to make them great.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The United States Air Force Academy (USAFA) provides a unique niche as a military institution because it offers: an elite undergraduate educational program, a world-class training program in the profession of arms, a rigorous 4-year regimen of physical education classes, competitive National Collegiate Athletic Association Division I athletics program, and an overarching character development program. At the completion of this 47-month experience, graduates are commissioned as second lieutenants and are expected to have acquired a sophisticated combination of the knowledge, skills, and values needed to succeed in leading fellow Airmen in defense of the United States.

The mission statement 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.” USAFA defined a “Leader of Character” (LOC), as one who: (a) *lives honorably* by consistently practicing the virtues embodied in the Air Force Core Values (i.e., integrity first, service before self, and excellence in all we do); (b) *lifts people* to their best possible selves; and (c) *elevates performance* toward a common and noble purpose (Center for Character and Leadership Development [CCLD], 2011). In the United States military, service is seen as a profession, thus military members are all considered to be a part of the Profession of Arms (POA). Members of the POA must consistently make ethical decisions within a professional moral code because they are responsible for the safety of this nation’s citizens and potentially responsible for saving and taking lives. Therefore, failure to live from a place of strong moral virtue is dangerous to the Air Force mission.

Ethical behavior within the military has always been a point of emphasis, with media, Congress, and senior military leaders addressing notable failures in adhering to the image of

being a member of the POA. A few notable scandals that involved a breach of trust in character and virtue expected of members within the POA since 2000 include: (a) the sexual assault scandal at USAFA (2003), (b) the Abu Ghraib prison torture scandal (2003); (c) the Boeing Bribery Scandal (2004); (d) the Haditha massacre (2005); (e) the Ishaqi incident (2006); (d) the U.S. Air Force Basic Training scandal (2011); (e) the CIA director Patraeus's (retired Army General) removal for an affair (2012); (f) the Air Force Missile exam cheating scandal (2014); (g) the U.S. Armed Forces nude photo scandal (2017); and (h) the Navy SEAL Eddie Gallagher's war crimes (2017). These ethical breaches undermine the very core of the trust allotted to the military to protect and defend the Constitution of the United States and the freedom of its citizens.

The Air Force understands the importance of ethical leadership. They have established the Air Force Ethics Office (AFEO), with the stated mission to be the premier ethics program in the U.S. Government through training, education, and case specific guidance (AFEO, 2020). The Air Force has established general principles to guide conduct for all employees, with the foundational premise being that public service "is a public trust, requiring employees to place loyalty to the Constitution, the laws and ethical principles above private gain" (AFEO, 2020). Moral courage to act ethically at all times requires genuine commitment, the kind of commitment both instilled and expected at USAFA.

Why Understanding and Measuring Commitment Matters

Commitment is considered an instrumental component for understanding human behavior with roots in psychology and sociology. The association with key concepts including motivation, engagement, culture, and leadership make commitment one of the most frequently studied organizational concepts (Klein et al., 2009). The importance of understanding and assessing

commitment is evident by the consistent body of research dedicated to studying it over time (Meyer & Parfyonova, 2010; Yahaya & Ebrahim, 2016). This is due in large part to research findings correlating commitment to beneficial organizational outcomes including: work motivation, Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB), job performance, job satisfaction, and turnover reduction (Chen et al., 2016; Chughtai & Zafar, 2006; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Meyer et al., 2013; Wombacher & Felfe, 2017). Research also has suggested organizational commitment can be influenced by interpersonal factors such as leadership (Broadhurst, 1996; Yahaya et al., 2016), organizational factors such as organizational support (Thomas et al., 2005), organizational culture (Klein et al., 2012; Silverthorne, 2004; Thomas et al., 2005), and subcultures (Lok et al., 2005). Therefore, member commitment can be an effective tool in assessing the overall health of an organization.

Commitment is a key component of learning organizations (Senge, 1993). As Yahaya and Ebrahim (2016) stated, commitment connects employees to their organizations (Meyer & Allen, 1997) and enhances organizational effectiveness (Fornes et al., 2008). Meyer and Allen (1997) viewed organizational commitment as foundational to shaping individual attitudes and behaviors within the organizational context. One example of this influence is research showing committed employees have greater motivation (Fornes et al., 2008). The connection commitment has with increased motivation provides logical inference as to why organizational commitment has consistently been positively correlated with organizational outcomes, including job performance, employee satisfaction, and lack of turnover (Yahaya et al., 2016). Although individual commitment to an organization is important, it is not easily achieved. A global study in 2002 found over one third of employees had low commitment levels, and only 8% identified as

“company oriented” (Fornes et al., 2008, p. 340). Using a precise definition and associated construct is necessary to accurately measure and assess commitment.

Problem Statement

USAFA’s “why” is evident in both the vision “to serve as the Air Force’s premier institution for developing leaders of character” and associated mission “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.” USAFA (2019) has claimed to produce the nation’s best leaders of character. However, there is no empirical evidence for this claim, as USAFA does not currently have a formal process to objectively measure character throughout the 47-month process. USAFA’s current inability to empirically assess and validate character development reduces credibility and hinders effectiveness of the character development process.

Although there are many ways to gain insight as to how well USAFA as an institution is accomplishing the mission to develop character, each has limitations. Seeking to quantitatively measure character requires a minimum of two things: first, it requires an agreed upon definition/construct or a list of virtues necessary and sufficient to fully encapsulate a LOC; second, it requires the means to measure these characteristics precisely and effectively over time to accurately assess them. Character can be defined as “an individual’s set of psychological characteristics that affects that person’s ability and inclination to function morally” (Berkowitz, 2002, p. 48). Berkowitz (2002) acknowledged these characteristics must be defined and outlines moral anatomy with the following seven components: moral behavior, moral values, moral personality, moral emotion, moral reasoning, moral identity, and foundational characteristics. Any model of character should incorporate the cognition, affect and behavior (i.e., head, heart and hand), which is why it is a complex psychological concept (Berkowitz, 2002). Even if the

focus is narrowed to the virtues associated with ethical leadership outlined within USAF doctrine, the list is overwhelming: commitment, competence, courage, determination, emotional stability, energy, followership, growth-mindset, humanness, humility, loyalty, sacrifice, self-management, and valor (Air Force Volume 2, 2015). Even if this list is reduced to basic core values, there is complexity.

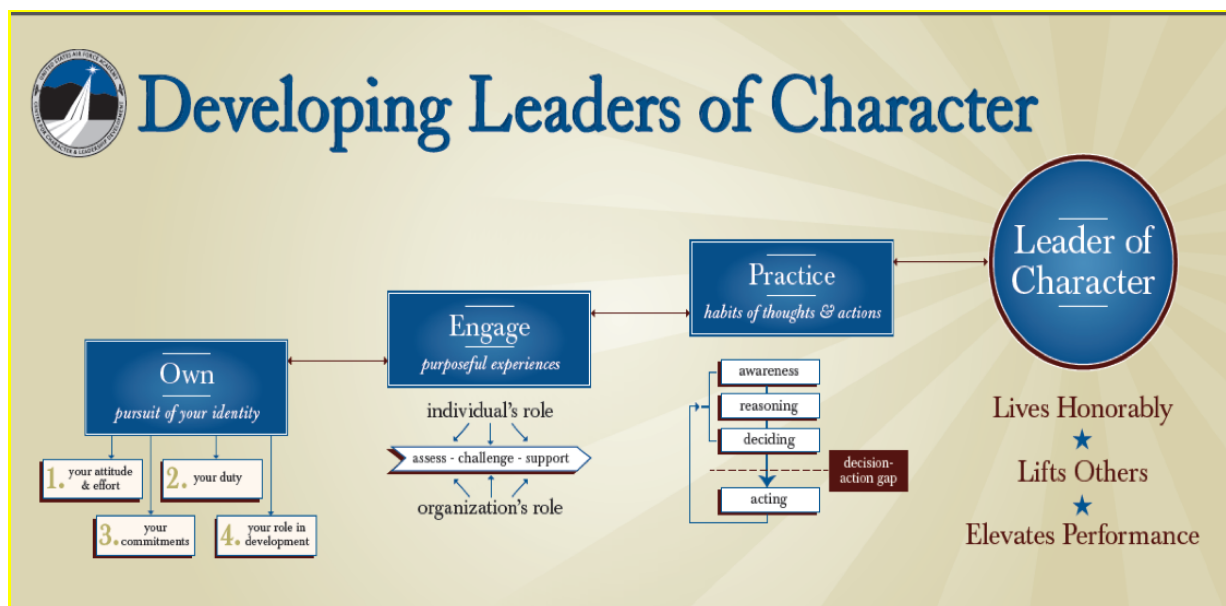
The Air Force considers their institutional core values as the moral backbone for military personnel. This professional foundation for success as an Airman consists of three fundamental values to guide decisions: integrity first, service before self, and excellence in all we do (AF Vol 2, 2015). The definition and explanation of these constructs include complex concepts including accountability, consistency of moral action, moral compass or code, performance, trustworthiness, sacrifice, and self-control (AF Vol 2, 2015). Due to the complexity, gaining consensus on a construct that fully encompasses the values and virtues of a LOC is challenging. In addition, a valid and reliable construct measure is required.

As noted in *Approaches to the Development of Character* (2017), all three fundamental principles of measurement (equivalence, reliability, and validity) present challenges in measuring the attributes, knowledge, and skills within a precise definition of character. Berkowitz (2002), one of the foundational experts on character education, explains the difficulty in measuring character: “The field of character education is rife with controversy as debates question whether the focus should be on virtues, values, behaviors, or reasoning capacities” (p. 43). The mythological shortcomings of character development are well documented with criticism related to instrumentation, sampling procedures, design, and supporting theories (Rudd & Mondello, 2006). Thus, it is easier to focus on display of immoral behavior (e.g., lying, stealing, cheating) and label the people displaying such behavior as lacking the prescribed character.

USAFA's main means to evaluate character is through observation of key negative behaviors highlighting deficient character (e.g., violation of the honor code, criminal activity) and then seek to rehabilitate (e.g., probation) or disenroll the cadet. One limitation of this approach is the dependency on catching these deficiencies. One notable constraint is that the mere absence of observable immoral behavior does not necessarily equate to high character. These limitations are exacerbated due to USAFA's organizational structure and associated culture, which is overly reliant on transactional leadership and the use of positional power in the form of extrinsic incentives and the threat of punishment for behavior modification. Research on transactional leadership behaviors has revealed this results in compliance at best and often resistance (Dobbs, 2015). Development of character and the associated virtues is a process and requires commitment to a lifestyle of honorable living with continual self-assessment. Virtues are developed through consistent practice of core values with reflection and intentionality. USAFA's model for developing LOC requires cadet commitment to *own* their development as outlined in Figure 1 (CCLD, 2011).

Figure 1

Framework for Character Development at USAF Academy



Note. From CCLD, 2011. USAFA's conceptual framework articulates a comprehensive approach to advance their bold vision to be the world's premier institution for developing leaders of character.

USAFA's ability to achieve its stated mission and overall credibility as an institution relies on cadets taking ownership of their development. Thus, it is prudent to systematically assess whether cadets are actually committed to the development of their character and to USAFA as an organization. Additionally, because commitment is not binary, it is important to understand the degree of which a cadet is committed to developing as a LOC, and what factors are associated with the variation in commitment levels.

Measuring cadet commitment is a pragmatic way to gain understanding of what is going on at USAFA because the construct is predicated upon important psychological components (e.g., engagement, identity, motivation, perceptions) as well as sociological concepts (climate, culture, relationships, leadership). Commitment as a definition contains both attitude and

behavioral elements. Theoretically, studying commitment is useful because it is associated with behavior. An often-cited definition of commitment is “a state of being in which an individual becomes bound by their actions and through these actions to beliefs that sustain the activities and their own involvement” (Salancik, 1977, p. 62). If cadets are committed to the mission, they are more likely to develop into a LOC. Researching cadet commitment is a useful way to determine how much risk USAFA is taking by not systematically assessing and incentivizing their stated mission. This study provides foundational data points to begin to assess how well USAFA is executing their vision for character and leadership.

Although USAFA currently lacks the data necessary to understand cadet commitment, the body of research on commitment also has gaps. Commitment is one of the most researched organizational constructs, yet the wide range of definition constructs have complicated the understanding of precisely *what* is being measured. This problem is further exacerbated by the dearth of qualitative research available to clarify and deepen our understanding the relationship between commitment and other variables (e.g., motivation, leadership).

Measuring and understanding cadet commitment at USAFA will help diagnose what changes are required to enhance leader development. If USAFA graduates are not committed to their lifelong development as a LOC, the risks can be catastrophic. In the POA, leaders are responsible for many lives—the lives of the Airmen they lead, the civilians whose lives they protect, and the combatant lives they could potentially take.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to develop an understanding of cadet commitment to assess USAFA’s effectiveness in developing LOC. This was accomplished by measuring how committed cadets are to their development as LOC. This study also sought to gain insight on the

key factors that influence cadet commitment levels, along with some of the potential outcomes associated with those commitment levels. Understanding cadet commitment levels as well as the associated antecedents and outcomes provide three key benefits: (a) insight into the pervasiveness and severity of cadet's lacking commitment, (b) insight into what factors hinder and enhance cadet commitment, and (c) understanding what outcomes are associated with commitment. To accomplish this task, a two-phase, explanatory, sequential design, mixed methods approach was used starting with the quantitative phase (survey), followed by the qualitative phase (semistructured interviews).

Research Questions

The specific purpose of the study was to increase awareness of the range and strength of cadet commitment at USAFA, the factors associated with varying commitment levels, and to develop an understanding of *why* these findings are present. The research questions that drove this methodological approach included:

1. To what extent are cadets committed to their development as LOC and to USAFA as an organization?
2. To what extent, if any, can variation in the commitment levels of cadets at USAFA be explained by select demographic and programmatic variables?
3. How and why are certain factors correlated with commitment levels at USAFA?

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The intent of this review of the literature is to provide a foundational understanding of the existing body of literature on commitment, including a justification for the definition construct, measuring tool, and associated process model used in this study. Due to the extensive literature on commitment, a full systematic review is unrealistic. Thus, there were two main approaches considered for this literature review: historic and conceptual. This review uses the conceptual approach by focusing on key categories of commitment related to the proposed dissertation study. The key categories of commitment explored include definition constructs, measurement tools, antecedents, outcomes, and limitations of the body of research to date.

Defining Commitment

According to Mowday et al. (1979), approaches to developing and defining commitment as a construct have been diverse since the conception of this line of research. A simple definition of *commitment* from Cambridge dictionary (2020) is twofold: (a) a promise or firm decision to do something or (b) the willingness to give your time and energy to a job, activity or something you believe it. The dictionary definition references both an attitude/state of mind and a behavioral element.

Commitment research has its origins in psychology and sociology, with the research centered on workplace commitment beginning to expand in the 1960s (Klein et al., 2009). The two main theoretical conceptions of commitment within this context have been rooted in either attitude or behavior constructs (Klein et al., 2009). Historically, core definitions using these two viewpoints are “the relative strength of an individual’s identification with and involvement in a particular organization” (Mowday et al., 1979, p. 226) from an attitudinal perspective, and “a state of being in which an individual becomes bound by his actions and through these actions to

beliefs that sustain the activities and his own involvement” (Salancik, 1977, p. 62) from a behavioral perspective. From this foundation, a wider range of constructs have evolved (Yahaya, 2016), as well as a lack of consensus among researchers, which has created confusion surrounding the terminology, nature and function of commitment (Klein et al., 2009). Table 1 provides a sampling of range of commitment definitions and how they have evolved from 1960 until present day.

Table 1

Definitions of Commitment

Reference (First Author, Year)	Commitment Definitions
Becker, 1960	Propensity of individual to engage in “consistent lines of activity” (p. 32) based on the individual’s recognition of the cost associated with discontinuing the activity. – Continuance component
Kanter, 1968	“The willingness of social actors to give energy and loyalty to social system . . . the process through which individual interests become attached to the carrying out of socially organized patterns of behavior which are seen as fulfilling those interests, as expressing the nature and needs of the person” (pp. 449-500). – Affective component
Sheldon, 1971	An “attitude or an orientation toward the organization which links or attaches the identity of the person to the organization” (p. 143). – Normative component
Porter, 1974	“The willingness of an employee to exert high levels of effort on behalf of the organization, a strong desire to stay with the organization, and an acceptance of its major goals and values” (p. 604). – Behavior-oriented component
Buchanan, 1974	“Affective attachment to the goals and values of the organization, to one’s role in relation to the goals and values, and to the organization for its own sake, apart from its purely instrumental worth” (p. 533). – Affective component
Salancik, 1977	“A state of being in which an individual becomes bound by his actions and through these actions to beliefs that sustain the activities and his own involvement” (p. 62). – Behavior-oriented component
Mowday, 1979	“The relative strength of an individual’s identification with and involvement in a particular organization” (p. 226). – Identification and behavior-oriented component
Meyer, 1991	“A psychological state with at least three separable components reflecting a) a desire (affective commitment), b) a need (continual commitment), and c) an obligation (normative commitment) to maintain employment in an organization” (p. 61). – TCM model foundation
Meyer, 2001	“Commitment is a force that binds an individual to a course of action of relevance to one or more targets” (p. 301). – Evolution of TCM definition into a “force”
Zangaro, 2001	“The act of pledging or promising to fulfill an obligation to someone or something at a future date” (p. 14). – Normative component

Table 1 continued*Definitions of Commitment*

Reference (First Author, Year)	Commitment Definitions
Gade, 2003	“A composite measure of various types of motives for remaining with, and performing for, an organization” (p. 164). – Distinct construct
Pool, 2007	“Organizational commitment defines how strong the individual’s beliefs are towards the organization and its goals” (p. 365). – Attitude/belief construct
Aydin, 2011	“Organizational commitment is a definite desire to maintain organizational membership, identification with the purposes, successes of organization, the loyalty of an employee, and a willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization” (p. 628). – Affective component
Klein, 2012	“A particular type of bond reflecting volitional dedication and responsibility for a target” (p. 130). – Distinct construct

These definitions have a great deal of variation referencing everything from cognitive processes (e.g., logic, reasoning, and decision making), to internal dispositions (e.g., mindsets, desires, and identifications), to expression through behaviors (e.g., pledges, involvement, and performance). However, themes do emerge from the collective body of research. Many definitions focus on behaviors demonstrating commitment (Mowday et al., 1979). One example is a “desire to maintain organizational membership . . . [resulting in] a willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization” (Aydin, 2011, p. 628). Another theme is defining commitment in terms of attitude, mindset, and rationales. Attitudinal commitment is distinct from behavioral commitment because it is focused on the process of how an individual comes to develop their relationship to the organization (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Additional conceptualizations combine behavioral and attitudinal components.

Some researchers, for example, combine cognitive attitudes with behavioral expression (Becker, 1960; Gade, 2003; Meyer, 2001; Porter, 1974). According to Yahara (2016), Porter’s (1974) behavior-oriented definition is the most widely used in current research, especially in

non-Western countries (Yousef, 2000). The foundational behavior-oriented construct has three main components: (a) belief in/acceptance of organizational goals and values (identification), (b) willingness to exert effort on behalf of the organization (behavior/action), and (c) desire to remain affiliated with organization or loyalty (Mowday et al., 1979). These definitions provide a picture of the commitment process where attitudinal disposition leads to loyalty, commitment, and even identification, which are displayed through behavior such as lack of turnover and enhanced effort. Mowday (1982) saw this interaction as reciprocal over time. As Allen (2003) highlighted, any review of the early literature on commitment reveals little attention was dedicated to commitment as a construct. Meyer and Allen (1991, 1997) moved beyond the attitudinal and behavior components by defining commitment as a psychological state or mindset. In doing so, they attempted to incorporate previous literature concepts into an all-encompassing definition construct.

Allen and Meyer's (1991, 1997) definition of commitment with three components led to a model construct referred to as the three-component model (TCM) with (a) an affective commitment (AC) or desire/want, (b) a normative commitment (NC) or obligation, and (c) a continuance commitment (CC) or need. This model attempted to mitigate the widespread criticism of the diverse range of definition constructs compounded by the measurement tools inaccurate reflection of espoused constructs (Meyer & Allen, 1991). One criticism by Allen (2003) of the TCM and all organization-specific constructs is the lack of transferability to other foci or targets (e.g., department, goal, mission or team), outcomes, or contexts (Klein et al., 2012). These concerns reinforce the need for clarity and precision in construct definition to effectively measure and compare research findings. As Cohen (2003) expressed, the core component explaining commitment has evolved to focus on the *relationship*, the emotional

attachment with the organization. Common terms using this idea include attachment, force, or bond (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Meyer & Allen, 1991; Morrow, 1993). Linking personal identity with the organization is common (e.g., Pool, 2007). Commitment constructs take many forms.

Many concerns persist about the commitment definition construct, specifically the concern over variation of definitions (Mowday et al., 1979), the universal focus on organizations as the commitment target (Klein et al., 2012), and associated challenges with conceptual distinction (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Klein et al. (2012) argued existing commitment constructs focused on organizational commitment hold two major faulty assumptions: (a) organizations are the primary target and (b) the norms related to organizations as targets hold true for other targets. Klein et al.'s (2014) solution is the Klein unidimensional target-free (KUT) commitment construct, which limits commitment to a specific type of bond. KUT is the definitional construct used in this research project and therefore will be discussed more extensively in this chapter.

The KUT definition emphasizes the distinctiveness of the commitment bond compared to other types of bonds (e.g., acquiescence, instrumental, and identification) as well as increasing its applicability for all targets by providing clarity and consistency to the commitment construct (Klein et al., 2012). Klein (2012) used the term *target* referring to the specific foci a bond is formed to (e.g., boss, goal, mission, organization, or team). This construct sees bonds on a continuum with commitment defined as “a volitional psychological bond reflecting dedication to and responsibility for a specific target” (Klein et al., 2012, p. 130). Such a psychological bond reflects the intent of commitment to be a psychological state changing over time based on many factors (Klein et al., 2014). The commitment bond is volitional in that the individual chooses to commit to the target and feels responsible for the commitment regardless of the reason (Klein et al., 2014). Klein (2014) specified this construct is unidimensional and target-free, meaning the

measurement scale is a single cohesive scale, the items are applicable to any target and still sensitive enough to measure differences in commitment to different targets. This target-free approach allows examining multiple commitments simultaneously held in a comparable way (Klein et al., 2012).

The KUT measure of commitment possesses three unique features: (a) its definition of commitment is distinctive and precise, (b) the definition and associated process model is applicable to all workplace targets (not just the organization), and (c) KUT allows for more precision in measuring antecedents and outcomes specifically related to the commitment construct (Klein et al., 2014). Ultimately, this definition reinforces the idea that commitment can vary in terms of its target (e.g., boss, goal, leader, mission, organization, team), its strength, and its rationale (Wright & Kehoe, 2009). This approach also removes some of the challenges with the diversity of definitional constructs based on specific foci of commitment (i.e., the specific targets) and bases of commitment (i.e., the motives stimulating attachment). The KUT construct allows for more precise measurement as justified in the measure section of this chapter.

Theoretical Underpinning for Commitment

There are a range of theoretical concepts that have propelled various conceptual models for understanding commitment. This review picks a representative sampling deemed as exemplar models in *Commitment in Organizations* (Klein et al., 2009).

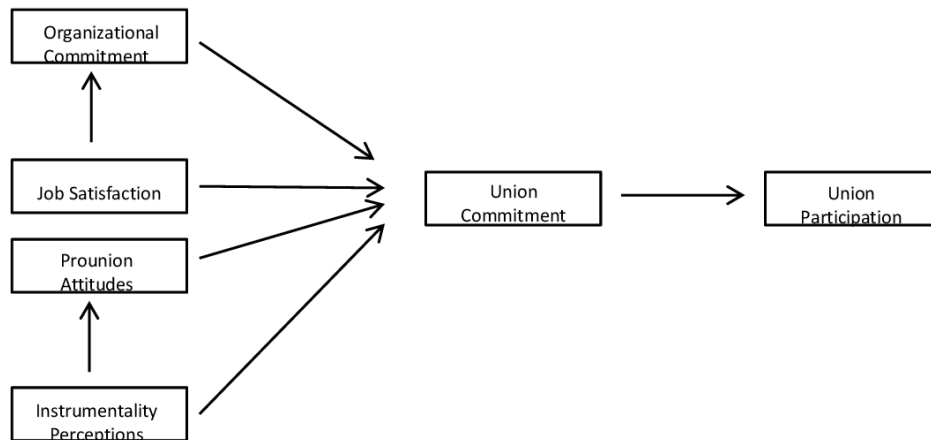
Social Exchange Theory

Social exchange theory proposes social behavior is based on an exchange process intended to maximize benefits and minimize costs (Cherry, 2019). Some commitment models following this logic include Becker's (1960) side bets, Salancik's (1977) need-satisfaction model, and Staw's (1981) escalation of commitment model. Staw's escalation model ties

commitment to a course of action based on three factors: (a) retrospective rationality to justify previous actions, (b) prospective rationality based on perceived probability and value of future outcomes, and (c) organizational and cultural norms. This approach reinforces the idea that choices are not made in isolation but rather influenced by both past and anticipated future events. Although there is continual debate between behavior-focused and attitude-focused models, there is consensus they are reciprocally related (Klein et al., 2009).

Union Commitment Theory (Attitudinal Approach)

Gordon et al. (1980) researched employee commitment to unions and created the groundwork for the union commitment model. This approach looked at four factors relating to commitment: (a) participation in the union; (b) individual and employer demographics; (c) satisfaction with job, company, and union; and (d) socialization influences. There were four outcome components: (a) union loyalty, (b) willingness to work for union, (c) responsibility to union, and (d) belief in the union. Socialization experiences were the greatest predictor for loyalty and belief in the union (Gordon et al., 1980). There have been many evolutions of this model by different researchers. Bamberger et al. (1999) conducted a meta-analysis of four models and found the integrative model to best fit the data. This model suggests job satisfaction only indirectly affects union commitment, as it is mediated by organizational commitment and attitudes toward the union (Bamberger et al., 1999). This is outlined in the integrative model in Figure 2.

Figure 2*Integrative Process Model of Union Commitment*

Note. From Bamberger et al. (1999). The integrated model for union commitment.

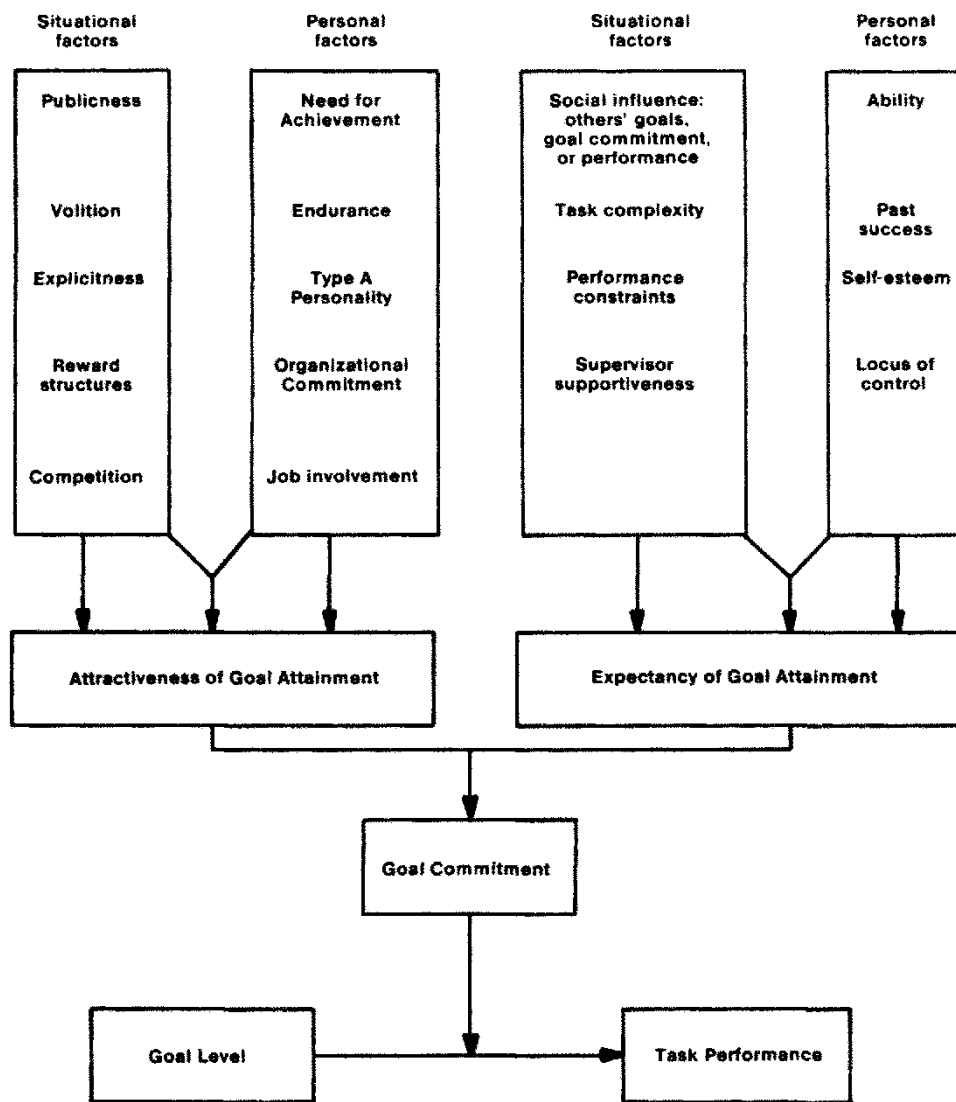
Expectancy Theory (Cognitive Approach)

The cognitive approach for examining commitment focuses on the conscious, rational determination of commitment to targets through one's perception, intuition, reasoning and acquisition of the information (Klein et al., 2009). Expectancy theory is largely attributed to Vroom (1964) and is the concept that people act based on their motivations and their motivations are related to the expected results of their behavior. Vroom's model was based on three factors that predict work motivation: (a) valence, defined as all possible outcomes but often interpreted as the importance, attractiveness, desirability, or anticipated satisfaction associated with those outcomes; (b) instrumentality, seen as relationship between outcomes or probability to obtain that outcome; and (c) expectancy, defined as subjective probability of an action leading to an outcome or the perceived relationship between action and outcome (Van Eerde & Thierry, 1996). Hollenbeck and Klein's (1987) goal commitment is a motivational construct that evolved from expectancy theory. The primary purpose of this model is to moderate the relationship between

goal difficulty and task performance (Klein et al., 2009). One important finding from Klein et al.'s (1999) meta-analysis was that although significantly associated, goal commitment is distinct from related concepts including: attractiveness, expectancy or motivation. The goal commitment model examines the attractiveness and likelihood of goal attainment as uses them commitment influencers as outlined in Figure 3.

Figure 3

Goal Commitment Model



Note. From Hollenbeck and Klein (1987).

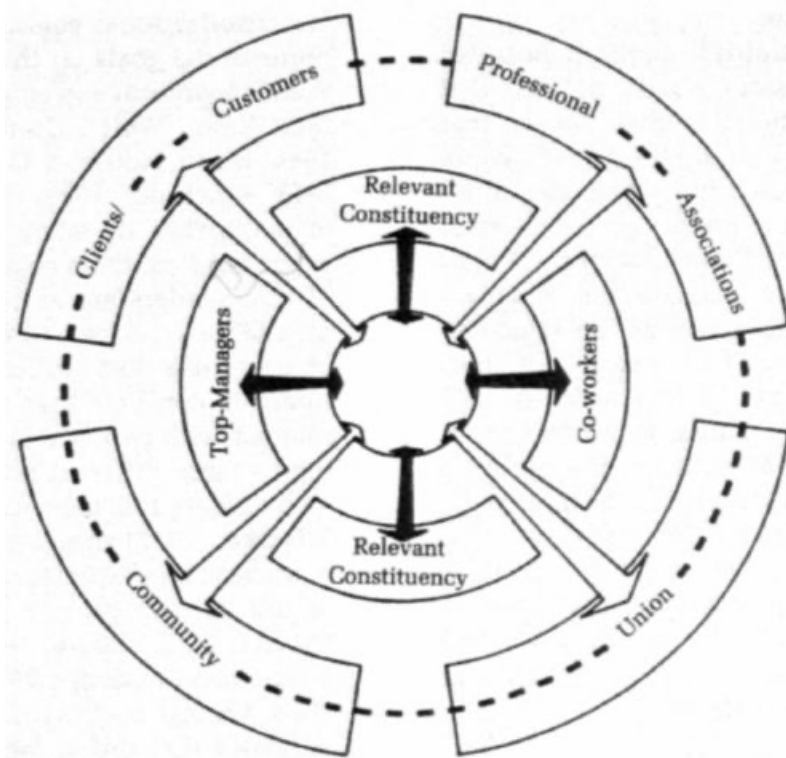
Integrative Theory Approach

Multiple Targets

Reichers (1985) outlined deficiencies and limitations of focusing solely on organizations as the target, along with the implications of *role theory* research, driving the need for a model allowing for multiple commitments simultaneously. The proposition of this model is that various commitment levels occur simultaneously to various groups within an organization (Reichers, 1985). Figure 4 shows how individuals are composed of identities within various different groups, individuals experience multiple commitments (i.e., attachments or linkages), and the organizational boundaries are permeable (Reichers, 1985).

Figure 4

Multiple Target Organization Commitment Model



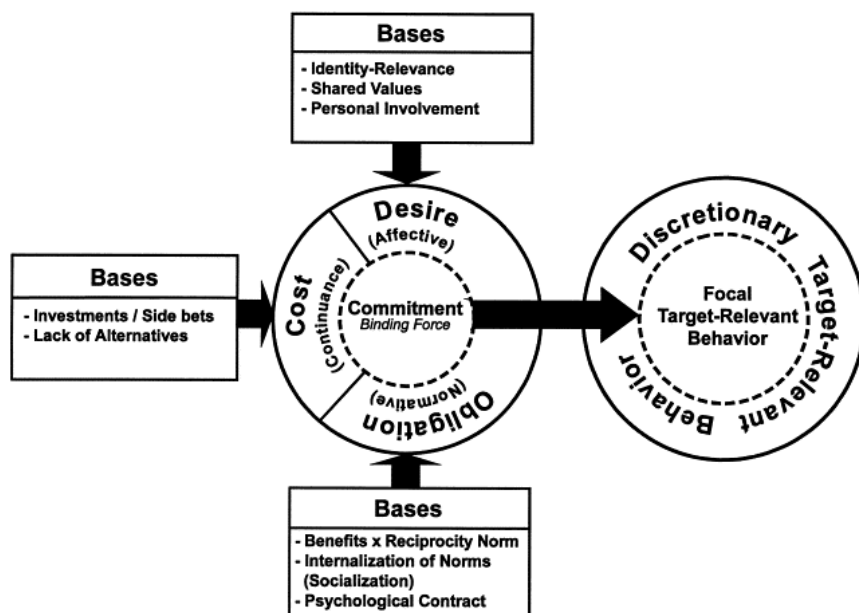
Note. From Reichers (1985).

Multiple Bases

Meyer and Allen (1991) contended previous behavioral or attitudinal approaches to defining commitment were limited and argued commitment as a psychological state is a multidimensional construct with three components or bases: (a) affective, (b) continuance, and (c) normative. Commitment bases are additive and create a binding force of commitment. After significant critiques of this philosophical approach emerged, Meyer and Herscovitch (2001) recharacterized commitment as a core essence that can be accompanied by different mindsets that play a role in shaping behavior. Mindsets are closely linked to different bases, while rationale reflects how an individual makes sense of their perceived bond (Klein et al., 2009). As Klein et al. (2009) pointed out, mindsets blur the boundaries between commitment and its antecedents and outcomes, while rationale reinforces commitment as distinct.

Figure 5

Multiple Base Commitment Model



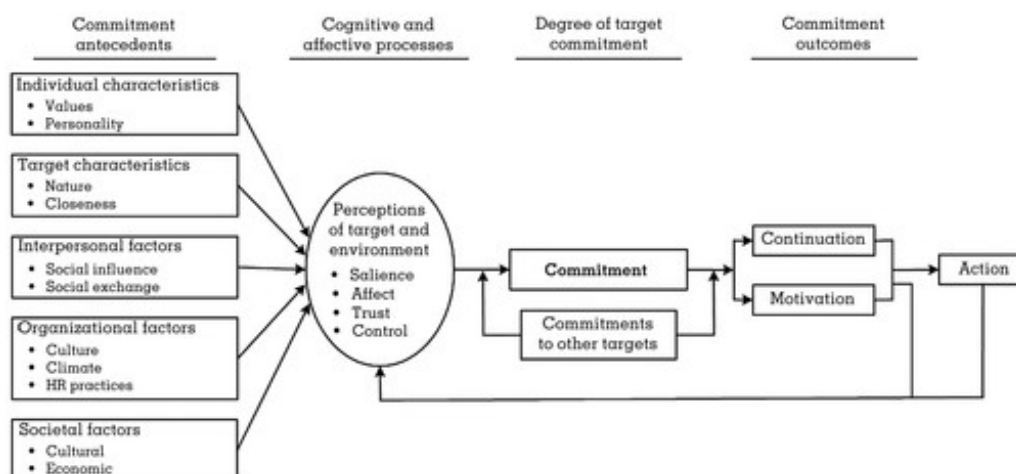
Note. From Meyer and Herscovitch (2001).

Self-Determination Theory

Self-determination theory (SDT) represents a broad framework for the study of personality and human motivation based on intrinsic and extrinsic sources of motivation, and a description of the respective roles these motivations play in cognitive and social development (Self-Determination Theory, 2020). Gagne and Deci's (2005) focus within SDT is on the distinction between autonomous motivation (i.e., intrinsic motivation) and controlled motivation (i.e., extrinsic motivation). Autonomy involves acting with a sense of volition and having the experience of choice, where controlled involves pressure of obligation (Gagne & Deci, 2005). Klein et al. (2012) developed the KUT process model (see Figure 6) focuses on a specific type of bond (i.e., commitment), distinct from other bonds. This model is loosely based on SDT and views commitment as dynamic, evolving based on continual feedback into the system, and views commitment and rationales as occurring simultaneously and influencing one another (Klein et al., 2009).

Figure 6

Process Model of Commitment to Any Workplace Target



Note. From Klein et al. (2012). The KUT commitment process model provides clear distinction between commitment and other constructs (e.g., motivation, continuation) and focuses on the individual cognitive and affective processes that shape the commitment bond.

Antecedents to Commitment

The lack of consensus regarding commitment constructs has produced various different measures, process models and associated antecedents, all of which create inconsistent and confusing results difficult for comparison (Allen, 2003; Darolia et al., 2010; Klein et al., 2014; Meyer & Allen, 1997). The antecedents (also referred in the literature as causes, correlates, development, influence and predictors) fostering and impacting commitment are vast (Allen, 2003; Wright & Kehoe, 2009). This review uses KUT's process model (see Figure 6) to frame categories of antecedents: the individual, target-based and interpersonal characteristics as well as organizational factors that affect individual perceptions that allow a commitment bond to be created (Klein et al., 2012). This review aligns previous studies' antecedent groupings within this framework. Although this study will not measure each of these categories in depth, it is important to be aware of how they may influence individual cadet commitment levels.

Previous metaanalysis have provided a wide range of antecedents to commitment. As Yahaya and Ebrahim (2016) noted in their literature review, three major meta-analysis studies had different but interrelated findings of OC antecedents. First, Mathieu and Zajac (1990) found personal characteristics, job characteristics, group-leader relations, organizational characteristics, and role states as antecedents of organizational commitment. Meyer et al. (2002) found demographic variables, individual differences, work experiences and investments as OC antecedents. Finally, Fornes et al. (2009) found congruency, interesting work, clarity of purpose, equity and fairness, feedback and recognition, empowerment, and autonomy as OC antecedents.

Historically, the two most used measurement constructs, the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ) and the three component model (TCM), both have process models that group antecedents and drive their questions. The OCQ is modeled off of three main categories of

antecedents: personal characteristics (e.g., age, tenure, education level, gender, race, and personality factors), job or role-related characteristics (e.g., job scope, job challenge, role conflict, or role ambiguity), and work experiences (e.g., organizational dependability, expectations being met, personal importance to organization, attitude about organization, leadership; Mowday et al., 1982). Meyer and Allen (1991) provided specific antecedents associated with each of their three types of commitment, including: (a) personal characteristics, job characteristics, work experiences, and structural characteristics for affective commitment; (b) the magnitude and number of side-bets or actions taken that increase the cost of dissociation as antecedents of continuance commitment; and (c) the individuals experiences before and during employment (e.g., family and cultural socialization, work experiences) for normative commitment. This list highlights the complexity of creating an inclusive approach for all conceptualizations of commitment, with varying foci and bases, their associated antecedents and outcomes, especially when accounting for differing contexts and interpretations of all of these factors.

The KUT model is a hybrid of two previous model constructs: (a) the member model focused on personal variables and (b) the organizational model focused on role, structural, and work-experience related variables (Cohen, 1992). A meta-analysis of these two constructs showed the significance of correlation within these models vary based on many things, including role and industry (Cohen, 2003). The KUT model creates five categories of factors or characteristics as antecedents to commitment: (a) individual characteristics, (b) target characteristics, (c) interpersonal factors, (d) organizational factors, and (e) societal factors (Klein et al., 2012).

Individual Characteristics

Although analysis and synthesis of commitment happens at a collective level, it is largely considered to be an individual based construct (Wright & Kehoe, 2009). Both individual characteristics (e.g., values, personality) and personal perceptions of the environment and target context (e.g., affect, control, salience, and trust) impact individuals' beliefs, emotions and behaviors in different ways and to different degrees (Wright & Kehoe, 2009). Individual characteristics include personal values, traits, and demographics. Examples of studies tying individual characteristics outlined in the KUT model of commitment include affect (Watson & Clark, 1984), perceived competence (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990), personal traits (e.g., conscientiousness, extraversion, achievement-orientation, affiliation, values and autonomy needs, attachment style, risk aversion; Mowday et al., 1982; Neubert & Wu, 2009) propensity to trust and perception of control (Rotter, 1971), and work ethic (Mirels & Garrett, 1971). Demographic components seen as antecedents associated with commitment include age, gender, marital status, education level, and tenure/length of service (Yahaya et al., 2016). However, some of these findings have been disputed and many assert no correlation exists between personal characteristics and commitment (e.g., education; Balfour & Wechsler, 1996). The Air Force aspires to maintain a diverse Total Force including factors such as personal life experiences, geographic and socioeconomic backgrounds, language abilities, spiritual perspectives, age, race, ethnicity, and gender (AFI 36-7001, 2019). USAFA is currently ranked in the top 15% most diverse universities in the United States overall and top 1% for geographical diversity (College Factual, 2019). Thus, individual backgrounds, associated experiences and perspectives are wide-ranging at USAFA.

Target Characteristics

The second antecedent category is target characteristics. Target characteristics have a few main components as outlined in the KUT model (Klein et al., 2012) including: target type (e.g., goal, leader, ideal, or organization), psychological proximity, cognitive distance, and the targets' reputation can all influence the cognitive and effective processes as individuals perceive their target. A pointed example within the military was individual commitment results differ for different *foci* based on factor analysis between commitment to the special forces versus the military in general (Allen, 2003). The greater focus has been on organizational factors and associated job or work components (Allen, 2003; Klein et al., 2014; Meyer et al., 1991). At USAFA the history, tradition and reputation of the institution have created a culture that underlines the individual perceptions of the target two specific targets for this study: character development and USAFA as an organization.

Interpersonal Factors

The next category of antecedents is interpersonal factors. Klein (2012) described the interpersonal factors are the social influence and associated exchange that occurs through relational dialogue affecting the commitment bond. One prime example of this is how group membership and team cohesion are correlated with commitment levels (Neininger et al., 2010; Wombacher & Felfe, 2017). One notable challenge associated with this concept is how membership or cohesion differ based on individual perceptions of how personal characteristics are received by the group (Allen, 2003). Another main interpersonal factor extensively covered in the literature is how leadership style affects OC (Chen, 2004; Yahaya et al., 2016). Many studies have shown positive correlation between certain leadership behaviors (e.g., transformational leadership components), relational behaviors (e.g., leadership-member

exchange, team-member exchange) and organizational commitment (Banks et al., 2014; Tremblay, 2010; Yahaya et al., 2016).

Different types of leadership behaviors and associated displays of authority can influence commitment level. Raven (1993, 2008) coined the term “social power” defined as potential or ability of an agent to bring change in attitudes, behavior, or belief by using resources available to them; and decoupled it from “leadership” or influence as the actual use of power to effect attitude or behavior change. Transactional leadership occurs when a leader focuses on rewards or discipline of their followers based on the adequacy of the followers’ performance. It has three main subcomponents: contingent reward, management by exception and laissez-faire (Avolio, 2002). Contingent reward leadership sees tasks that need to be accomplished and uses rewards as the motivation for followers to accomplish a task. This is quid-pro-quo or exchange focused leadership. Management by exception (MBE) focuses on correction when performance is not meeting standards. It can be active or passive. Active MBE actively monitors standards, measuring mistakes and errors to then correct behavior (Avolio, 2002). Passive MBE uses corrective actions only in reaction when clear mistakes are observed. Transactional leadership uses specific bases of power that create a compliance-based culture.

French and Raven coined the term “bases of power” or the sources from which a leader derives the ability to influence others (Ott et al., 2008; Raven, 1965, 2008). They have identified five bases of power under two categories: (a) positional power and (b) personal power. Positional power relates to position or rank, but responses are usually either resistance or at best compliance. The three types of positional power are (a) legitimate, (b) coercive, and (c) rewards. Legitimate power exists when a subordinate is obligated to comply with a supervisor. Coercive power seeks to influence behavior through threatening negative or undesirable consequences

(Dobbs, 2015). Reward power is basically offering positive incentives to gain desired behavior. Personal power is relational and takes significantly more effort to use properly, but when used creates commitment (Raven, 2008). The two types of personal power are expert and referent. Expert power is when one possesses task-relevant knowledge or special abilities desired by the follower (Dobbs, 2015). Finally, referent power is relationship based when the leader has a strong potential influence on the follower based on the subordinates' respect for the leader. These bases of power relate to culture and responses of followers to their authority along the spectrum from resistance to compliance to commitment.

These relational behaviors' correlation with commitment can also differ based on environment and culture (Jackson et al., 2013), which leads to organizational factors.

Organizational Factors

In the textbook *Organizational Commitment*, Wright and Kehoe (2009) codified organizational-level antecedents into four main categories covering the range of organizational antecedents identified in the literature: structure, culture, climate and human relations (HR) practices. Structure can be conceptualized as the distribution of relationships across departments and functional units of an organization (Power, 1988). Reichers and Schneider (1990) defined climate as the shared perceptions of organizational policies, practices and procedures, both formal and informal (Wright & Kehoe, 2009). For purposes of OC research, culture can be characterized as the organizational norms and expectations (Wright & Kehoe, 2009). Examples of organizational-level antecedents extensively substantiated through metaanalysis include congruency (Fornes et al., 2008), empowerment (Fornes et al., 2008), equity and fairness (Fornes et al., 2008; Meyer et al., 2002), interesting and purposeful work (Fornes et al., 2008), involvement/participation (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990), organizational support (Meyer et al., 2002),

role related factors (ambiguity, conflict, and overload; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Meyer et al., 2002), recognition/reward allocation (Cohen & Gattiker, 1994; Fornes et al., 2008), satisfaction (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990), and size of the organization (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990). Although the literature also has discussed person-organization fit as an antecedent (Allen, 2003), it is unclear exactly which bucket it falls under within the KUT framework. The final category of commitment antecedents is societal factors.

Societal Factors

Societal factors include both cultural context and economics, as these can shape both meaning and perception (Klein et al., 2012). Cultural context can shape individual perception and meaning influencing the bond between individual and target (Klein et al., 2012). As cited by Klein (2012), an example of this would be a high uncertainty avoidance culture described by Hofstede's (1980) cultural dimensions theory where increased desire for control could enhance the probability of a commitment bond to form. Conceptual societal factors to be considered could include public perception of the military and current unemployment rates. This section has covered the body of literature related to antecedents leading to commitment bonds.

Consequences/Outcomes of Commitment

One of the reasons commitment has been such a focus of research is due to the strong correlation with individual outcomes important to organizations including absenteeism, job performance, job satisfaction, lack of turnover, morale, motivation, and organizational citizenship behaviors (Chen et al., 2006; Cohen, 2003, 2000; Klein et al., 2009; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Meyer et al., 1997; Meyer et al., 2002; Mowday et al., 1982; Porter et al., 1974; Riketta, 2002; Yousef, 2000). Although many of these findings are significant, there is reason to temper expectations. Specifically, as described in detail in the measurement section, the lack of

measurement precision and conflated of constructs create limitations in our current understanding of commitment outcomes. Additionally, due to the scarcity of longitudinal or qualitative research examining commitment, it is difficult to distinguish commitment outcomes from its antecedents.

There are a two main thematic of categories of commitment outcomes. First, is an extensive body of research correlating commitment with increased job production and performance (Allen, 2003; Chen et al., 2006; Fornes et al., 2008; Katzenbach, 2000; Klein et al., 1999; Meyer et al., 2002; Yahaya, 2016; Yousef, 2000). Second, is a positive correlation with participation and engagement related behaviors (e.g., accountability, continuation, extra role performance, job satisfaction, OCBs) combined with negative correlation with other behaviors (e.g., absenteeism, tardiness, turnover) beneficial for organizational success (Allen, 2003; Allen & Meyer, 1990; Fornes et al., 2008; Klein et al., 2012; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Meyer et al., 2002; Yahaya et al., 2016). Klein et al. (2012) created the KUT process model, which focuses on proximal outcomes across targets, with only two constants: (a) continuation and (b) motivation. Klein noted some outcomes are more relevant to specific targets.

Continuation is the opposite to turnover. The term continuation is composed as an intent and is used in the KUT model because it applies to all targets and reflects the expected outcome as opposed to lack of turnover or withdrawal (Klein et al., 2012). Conceptually, commitment to a target should result in participation, allocation of effort, and support. Many terms and associated constructs address this concept (e.g., engagement or motivation). As Klein (2012) articulated, the definition used for each of these concepts will determine the amount of conceptual overlap. The KUT model focuses on motivation as a commitment outcome, while acknowledging it is not the only factor influencing motivation (Klein et al., 2009). Although outcomes of commitment are

interesting, they are not the main focus of this study. The focus of this study is on acutely measuring commitment and understanding the factors associated with it.

Measuring Commitment

Historical measures used to study organizational commitment are as diverse as the definition constructs. Many measures of commitment are not validated nor reliable, with little evidence the necessary work was done to ensure the various instruments were stable, consistent or predictive (Mowday et al., 1979). Unfortunately, almost 40 years later, there is still no consensus for structure, measurement, or meaning related to commitment (Klein et al., 2012). All commitment constructs conceptualize commitment as either unidimensional (e.g., notable researchers include Klein et al. [2014] and Mowday et al. [1982]) or multidimensional (e.g., Meyer & Allen, 1991). Yet the commitment process producing the psychological state of commitment is not well understood and is also under extensive scrutiny for lack of a theoretical underpinning (Meyer & Allen, 1997). The lack of theoretical underpinning exists even within the subset of commitment research focused on the organization, where the majority of commitment research has been focused (Allen, 2003). This problem is magnified as commitment research has evolved from focusing the organization to other work-related domains (Allen, 2003; Meyer & Allen, 1997).

The concerns associated with the accurate measurement of commitment are more severe in the subcategory of commitment literature in a military context, with military research using ad hoc scales without theoretical underpinnings (Allen, 2003; Gade, 2003). Another valid critique of the literature as a whole is the lack of delineation between commitment and other variables (e.g., identification, motivation, satisfaction, or turnover intentions) due to lack of precision in constructs (Jaros, 2009; Klein et al., 2014). Although concerns over various conceptualizations

and measurement of constructs are common within organizational psychology (Meyer & Allen, 1997), clarity of construct intent is important for precise measurement and analysis of results.

Many commitment measures will not be addressed in this literature review for one of four reasons: (a) the commitment measure is behavior-focused, (b) other constructs are the focus of the article, (c) the measure has not proven reliable and valid, or (d) it has not been used extensively or recently. First, many early commitment measures used behavior as the measure for commitment (e.g., Becker's [1960] side-bet theory; Salancik's [1977] model). Although there are other issues with behavior-based measures (e.g., validity concerns with Becker's side bet theory; Jaros, 2009), the reason for their omission in this chapter is over concern about construct methodology. As Klein (2014) pointed out, behavior-based models use outcomes as measures of commitment, creating construct concerns and reducing construct validity. An example of this is measure turnover as an indicator of lack of commitment when other factors influence turnover (e.g., spouse job relocation).

Secondly, many scales under the body of commitment research use other construct foci (e.g., absenteeism, motivation, satisfaction, turnover) as the items of measurement (Mowday et al., 1979). Recent studies follow this trend with study measurement focus on other factors including corporate social responsibility (Muhammad et al., 2017), identity (Carlsson et al., 2015), job embeddedness (Clinton et al., 2012), or organizational trust (Tarcan et al., 2013). Thirdly, this review omits commitment construct measures lacking research corroborating their reliability and validity. Wardley's (2013) work is an example of a recent study using an invalid measure to evaluate traditional and nontraditional students' commitment levels. Finally, this review excludes commitment measures with limited use (e.g., the commitment index or CI, which was only used in one study with little to no detail to extrapolate; Casarejos et al., 2017), or

lacks recency (e.g., the union commitment scale or UCI, which focused dual commitment to the organization and unions; Gordon et al., 1980). The UCI construct was used a handful of times in the 1980s but has been used sparingly since 1990 with the last noteworthy article to include it being in 2005 (Cohen, 2005). This leaves four main commitment constructs worth consideration.

There are four main commitment focused constructs recently used in research, each of which contain an associated measure including: the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ; Mowday et al., 1979; Porter et al., 1974), the three component model (TCM; Meyer & Allen, 1991, 1997; Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001), the goal commitment or HWK scale (Hollenbeck et al., 1989; Klein et al., 1999), and, finally, the KUT model (Klein et al., 2012, 2014). The HWK scale is not discussed further in this review because its first author, Klein, has evolved the commitment measure into a more precise and universal commitment construct (i.e., KUT), which is covered extensively in this review.

Organizational Commitment Questionnaire

Mowday et al. (1982) established an organizational commitment construct focused on three factors or dimensions: (a) willingness to exert effort, (b) a desire to maintain membership in the organization, and (c) an acceptance of organizational values. Mowday's (1979) self-reporting questionnaire has 15 questions examining the three aspects of their definition, using a 7-point Likert scale. The accumulation of scores measures the strength of employee commitment through the lens of retention influence, ranging from "strong influence toward leaving" to "strong influence toward staying" (Mowday et al., 1979, p. 10). As Yahaya (2016) expressed, the OCQ has been used so frequently over time due to its ease of use, high reliability and high validity. Mathieu and Zajac's (1990) meta-analysis of the organizational commitment literature

found 103 articles using the OCQ or some subset of it (Bozeman & Perrewé, 2001). Although the OCQ has been used extensively, a number of concerns warrant attention.

The OCQ's basic structural approach, convoluted content and construct validity are dubious (Klein et al., 2014). Despite its widespread use, Bozeman and Perrewé (2001) called attention to many specific concerns including sparse evidence of its construct validity and the instability of factor dimensionality shown in OCQ scale factors, some of which are due to redundancy within the construct. Some studies have used a reduced 9-scale OCQ (e.g., Morrow, 1993) in an attempt to reduce the overlap (Bozeman & Perrewé, 2001). Concern has been raised surrounding the construct's measurement of outcomes as constructs (e.g., measuring retention items with turnover outcomes) with factor analysis confirming many of the OCQ questions are retention-related items (Bozeman & Perrewé, 2001). Furthermore, a longitudinal study of Navy personnel designed to evaluate the dimensionality and stability of the OCQ had a few noteworthy findings, including (a) factor analysis showed the OCQ actually measures two separate, but highly correlated dimensions: value commitment or commitment based on common values and commitment to stay within the organization; and (b) the OCQ lacks stability, most notably the reliability of the measure increases based on the amount of time the individual has been in the organization (Tetrick & Farkas, 1988). This study also indicated the OCQ is a poor measure of commitment for employees who have only been in their organization for a short period (Tetrick & Farkas, 1988). This study also corroborated existing concerns that the OCQ uses retention as a main measure of commitment.

Using retention of a measure for commitment is troubling because it combines retention and commitment. It is without question that an employee may remain with an organization and yet not be committed to it (e.g., a high school dropout remains a gas station attendant due to

necessity). As Klein et al. (2012, 2014) points out, there are many different types of bonds (e.g., acquiescence and commitment) with a different set of associated outcomes. This bolsters their contention that different types of psychological bonds warrant separate definitions and examination as outlined in the KUT process model (Klein et al., 2014). The KUT model is rooted in self-determination theory (Gagne & Deci, 2005).

Three-Component Model (TCM)

The TCM model moves beyond the attitudinal and behavioral commitment dichotomy to viewing commitment as a psychological state with three separate components: a desire or affective commitment or (AC); an obligation or “normative” commitment (NC); and a need or “continuance” commitment (CC; Meyer & Allen, 1991, p. 61). With that said, the NC component measures behavior (e.g., remaining with the organization) as an item construct for psychological state. The TCM was a significant revelation in study of commitment with extensive research supporting its reliability (Meyer & Allen, 1991, 1997). As Gade (2003) pronounced, the TCM was the most developed and comprehensive organizational commitment model up to the early 21st century. The AC component which uses desire, motivation and identification as a measure construct approach has many advocates who see it as clear with focused measures (Cohen, 2003; Fornes et al., 2006), while others see all three components as confounding content with extraneous concepts (Jaros, 2007; Klein et al., 2014). Although the TCM has been widely used, substantial concerns remain including construct validity and its target-specific approach.

The concerns researchers have expressed regarding the validity of the TCM construct are extensive. Although the TCM seeks to assess three dimensions, factor analysis in many studies has shown that to be a faulty assumption, with significant overlap between the AC and NC

components (Allen, 2003; Gade, 2003; Klein et al., 2012). NC has been seen as dual constructs of moral imperative and an indebted obligation (Gellatly et al., 2006). Meyer and Parfyonova (2010) admit the dual nature of NC and claim it manifests differently based on the employee's commitment profile. Some researchers have removed the NC measure due to its high correlation with the AC component (Gade, 2003). Another main concern with the TCM construct is the multidimensionality of the CC measure. Many researchers have expressed concern that CC measures two unique items: the low alternatives and high sacrifice (Klein et al., 2012). This concern begs the question, are these two factors a collective way to understand the continuance component of commitment or are they independent concepts related to the concept of commitment? This topic has spurred much debate with two notable positions: removal of both concepts as commitment measures (Klein et al., 2014) or seeing low alternatives as an antecedent to commitment (Allen, 2003). Another concern Klein et al. (2012) emphasized is the target-specific nature of the TCM question items and whether they apply to other targets. With this list of concerns, revisions were made to the construct.

Meyer and Herscovitch (2001) produced an updated model, acknowledging the previous concerns: "it is now well recognized that employees can develop multiple work-relevant commitments . . . and can take various forms, including commitment to organizations, occupations and professions, teams and leaders, goals and personal careers" (p. 299). This revision sought to develop a general model of workplace commitment to be used as a guide in research and practice by clarifying their position on five main areas of contention: (a) what commitment is and how it is distinguished from other constructs, (b) dimensionality, (c) target-specific or target-free, (d) behaviors as outcomes, and (e) how the commitment process works (Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001). They defined commitment as a binding force distinct from other

construct (Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001), yet used an inclusive approach of existing conceptualizations that still confounds commitment with other constructs and thus still flawed (Klein et al., 2012). Meyer and Herscovitch's (2001) updated TCM model claims to be unidimensional with three associated mindsets combined to create a commitment binding the individual to the organization yet is still multidimensional by definition (Klein et al., 2014). Dimensionality complicates the measurement construct.

The two main approaches to measurement, namely unidimensional and multidimensional, strongly shape the process framework for evaluation (Jaros, 2007). TCM's multidimensional construct necessitates each type or component of commitment requires a unique set of antecedents and associated effects (Meyer & Allen, 1991, 1997). As Jaros (2009) conveyed, multidimensional constructs present construct validity concerns, a common theme in OC literature where measure refinement lags behind conceptual refinement. Many of the conceptual changes articulated by Meyer et al. (2009, 2001, 2013, 2010) have yet to result in updated questionnaire items (Jaros, 2009). Although the TCM updates claim to alleviate the concerns related to the specific organizational commitment questions (Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001), the revised approach requires updated items and associated scales to truly be target free (Klein et al., 2012) and is still not seen as a general model of commitment (Solinger et al., 2008). All of these concerns promote consideration of a different approach for measuring commitment.

As Meyer and Allen (1991) stressed, problems associated with measuring commitment are intensified with the massive amounts of information available (e.g., inputs, outcomes, instrumentalities, and valiances). This, combined with extensive changes in the nature of work, organizations and their relationship (Rousseau, 2000), creates the need for a target-free approach

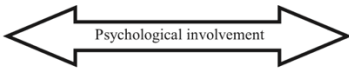
(Klein et al., 2012). Klein (2012) questioned the relevancy of commitment as currently constructed due to the evolving nature of commitment contexts.

Klein et al.'s Unidimensional Target-Free Model

The KUT's unidimensional and target-free process model aims to provide a clear framework applicable across targets to better understand commitment drivers (Klein et al., 2014). This construct offers both methodical and practical benefits including increased content validity, enhanced psychometric properties (e.g., reliability and target sensitivity), and evaluation across multiple targets simultaneously (Klein et al., 2014). The KUT model is a 4-item measure based on its conceptual definition with three notions: dedication (how dedicated a person is to the target), volition (to what extent has a person chosen to remain connected to the target), and responsibility for the target (to what extent does a person care about the target; Klein et al., 2014). A key facet of Klein's (2012) approach that makes this measurement construct unique is its assertion that different types of psychological bonds warrant separate definitions and examinations. Many other commitment constructs measure bonds not conceptualized as a "commitment" bond (e.g., OCQ, TCM) within the narrow KUT construct definition. Figure 7 shows this delineation of bonds.

Figure 7

Continuum of Bonds

A Continuum of Bonds				
Bond Differentiators	Acquiescence	Instrumental	Commitment	Identification
Defining feature	Perceived absence of alternatives	High cost or loss at stake	Volition, dedication, and responsibility	Merging of oneself with the target
How the bond is experienced	Resignation to the reality of the bond	Calculated acceptance of the bond	Embrace of the bond	Self-defined in terms of the bond
Corollaries of experiencing bonds differently	Low internalization Indifference Psychological withdrawal Low task significance Prevention focus Controlled motivation Minimal effort		High internalization High concern Psychological investment High task significance Promotion focus Autonomous motivation High effort	
Alignment of prior commitment conceptualizations				
Kelman (1958)		Compliance		Identification and internalization
Becker (1960) Etzioni (1961) Kanter (1968) Salancik (1977) Mowday, Steers, & Porter (1979)	Alienative Control and continuance	Sunk costs and side bets Calculative Continuance Behavioral consistency		Moral Cohesion
Brickman (1987) Meyer & Allen (1991)	Have to Normative and continuance	Have to Normative and continuance	Want to Affective and normative	Identification and involvement Want to Affective and normative

Note. From Klein et al., 2012. The KUT model defines commitment as a specific type of bond distinct from others (e.g., acquiescence, instrumental or identification) with defining features associated with each type of bond.

Although the concept of commitment as a construct lacks consensus (Yahaya et al., 2006), its measurement has clearly evolved over time from behavior based (Becker, 1960) to attitudinal (Kanter, 1968), to a psychological state (Salancik, 1977) or force (Meyer et al., 2001), to a hybrid approach (Aydin et al., 2011; Meyer & Allen, 1991; Pool, 2007). As the literature has evolved, analysis of the different psychological bonds is warranted (Klein et al., 2014). To use the same term to identify and quantify distinct experiences would be making a faulty assumption known as the jingle fallacy (Klein et al., 2012). As previously noted, different types or components of commitment have different antecedents and associated implications (Meyer & Allen, 1991, 1997), and this logic should persist in seeking to understand the distinction across

bond types. Anecdotally, most people have experienced the range of “attachment” bonds to others within an organization based on certain variables: following a leader so closely that absorption with the target occurs (identification), voluntarily caring and take responsibility for the success of a mission (commitment), following a toxic leaders’ direction due to concern over the consequences of opposing them (instrumental), and finally remaining in an organization due to the lack of alternatives (acquiescence; Klein et al., 2012). Each of these connections to a “target” represent distinct bond types needing precise and sensitive measurement to delineate them from the other elements.

Using a precise definition construct for commitment has many benefits. Klein (2014) designed the KUT model to exclude other concepts including identification, affect, motivation, and behavioral intention previously present to varying degrees within prior commitment measures. Although this commitment construct is more precise, it still has limitations. The continuum of bonds claims to be discontinuous with discernable segments (Gagne & Deci, 2005). Klein et al. (2012) admitted there are not clearly defined boundary demarcation lines, but rather “zones of overlap” (p. 135) yet to be established. This concern is important and requires further exploration as KUT is used more extensively for research.

However, for measurement purposes this construct still presents many advantages. First, as Klein (2014) justified, the KUT model is truly unidimensional based on factor analysis and internal consistency thresholds with factor loading ranging from .68 to .97 across multiple environments. Additionally, its target-free approach allows consistent assessment across multiple targets simultaneously (e.g., project, team, goal, and organization), which is critical as people can have multiple simultaneous commitments to different targets at different levels (Klein et al.,

2014). This tool provides ability to measure within-person variation in addition to and between-person variation.

A sample of approximately 2,500 subjects within a wide range of contexts, occupations, industries, and organizations across eight commitment targets attempted to compare results against existing commitment measures, specifically the OCQ and TCM constructs (Klein et al., 2014). When measured for internal consistency reliability, KUT was superior (with Cronbach's alphas ranging from .86 to .97 with 7 of 8 targets over .9; TCM ranging from .72 to .87; and OCQ at .81) and validity well above the .6 threshold ranging from .68 to .97 (Klein et al., 2014). This robust study shows promising results yet should be tempered due to the newness of the construct. This model needs further exploration longitudinally and across new contexts. This review of the literature found 11 studies using the KUT measure construct since its inception in 2012 (e.g., Bellamy, 2019; Bennett & Stanley, 2019) with one focusing on validating KUT's claims of robustness of use across targets with endorsing results of validity and reliability (Cannon & Herda, 2016). Although there remain different approaches to commitment measurement, the KUT construct shows tremendous promise due to its precision, validity, reliability and transferability across targets.

Limitations and Critique of Existing Literature

Due to the extensive body of literature on commitment, the emphasis of this critique is at the macro level (i.e., its focus is on overall trends from commitment literature, rather than a critique of specific articles). The biggest criticism stressed consistently in the literature related to organizational commitment is the vague and varied definition and construct discrepancies (Mowday et al., 1979), along with how many constructs confound commitment with other distinct constructs (Klein et al., 2012, 2014). This lack of clarity hinders the effectiveness of

studies and makes interpreting results challenging (Darolia et al., 2010; Klein et al., 2012). Conclusions surrounding commitment outcomes should be met with skepticism due to the construct clarity concerns (Klein et al., 2012). The commitment research has consistently used quantitative methodology from positivist social science (PSS) epistemology by seeking exact measurement through an objective lens (Neuman, 2011). Future study from the interpretive social science epistemological lens will be helpful in providing overall depth of understanding through emphasis on social interaction, socially constructed meaning and individual perspectives.

A glaring limitation of the commitment literature is the lack of research using the qualitative approach. Of over 100 peer-reviewed articles used for this review, there was not even a single qualitative-based article. Extensive quantitative-based studies have consistently shown strong correlations between various factors and commitment (e.g., Fornes et al., 2008; Mathieu & Zajak, 1990; Mowday et al., 1982; Yahaya et al., 2016). Yet a critique of the existing literature is the correlational nature of the studies. Although the commitment literature constructs are loosely tied to various theories, research to date has failed to provide clarity on how variables are related. For example, as discussed previously, many studies show job performance, satisfaction, and morale as outcomes of commitment (Chen et al., 2006; Cohen, 2003, 2000; Klein et al., 2009; Mathieu & Zajak, 1990; Meyer et al., 1997; Meyer et al., 2002; Mowday et al., 1982; Porter et al., 1974; Riketta, 2002; Yousef, 2000). However, studies also have shown self-efficacy, perceived organizational support, and relationships as antecedents to commitment (Darolia et al., 2010; Yahaya et al., 2016). This highlights the limitations of strictly quantitative-based research, especially with a lack of longitudinal studies. Studies limited to this methodology, are unable to determine the direction of correlation between variables (e.g., does

commitment lead to job satisfaction or vice versa). Can we be confident that job satisfaction is not actually an antecedent to commitment or organizational support is an outcome of commitment? This concern further validates the gap in existing quantitative-based research and advocates for future use of qualitative-based methodology to inform and enhance both commitment literature and its associated theoretical underpinning.

Balancing existing research on commitment, which is almost exclusively quantitative, with more qualitative methodology will provide extensive benefits, namely better understanding the meaning-making process outlined in the KUT process model of commitment. Better understanding of the context associated within a study due to the multivariate components of measure within a study will reduce potential errors (e.g., reductionism, spuriousness) currently present within the existing body of research (Patton, 2014). This is largely due to a few factors: the majority of commitment research has been focused on organizations as the commitment target (Klein et al., 2014); studies have all been conducted within developed country contexts (Yahaya et al., 2016); and measurement items assessing commitment are not easily adapted to alternative targets (Jaros, 2012). Although commitment is one of the most researched organizational concepts, many knowledge gaps exist, especially within a military context.

Commitment research tends to focus on aggregating individual results to a group level and has rarely been examined at the group level, providing pause into the predictive validity of group-level behaviors (Allen, 2003). Additionally, there are limited longitudinal studies on commitment, limiting ability to gain granularity on the commitment process (Allen, 2003). This makes it very challenging to account for the dynamic nature of commitment and all of the individual perceptual components influencing commitment (Klein et al., 2012). Additionally, most of the commitment measurement scales have gone through multiple rounds of revision,

creating difficulty comparing and generalizing results (Klein et al., 2014), as well as providing limited predictive validity (Klein et al., 2012). Further research is needed to understand different individuals' commitment, within different contexts, and toward various targets.

Developing character and leadership are the essence of the USAF Academy, its reason for existence and its WHY. Systematically assessing the development of character presents many challenges, including which virtues to measure and how to measure them. Although commitment also has historically been critiqued for variation and divergence of definition constructs (Klein et al., 2012; Meyer & Allen, 1991; Mowday et al., 1979), commitment is a useful construct to gain insight into the effectiveness of USAFA's conceptual framework for developing leaders of character.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to better understand how committed cadets at the U.S. Air Force Academy (USAFA) are to their development as Leaders of Character (LOC). To date, no empirical data have been collected to validate the foundational assumption within the LOC framework that cadets “own their commitment” (CCLD, 2011, p. 7). This framework intends to support USAFA’s (2019) stated mission: “To educate, train, and inspire men and women to become officers of character, motivated to lead the United States Air Force (USAF) in service to our nation.” Commitment is not a binary construct. Therefore, it was critical to differentiate the range of cadet commitment and to understand different factors associated with their commitment levels. This study used an explanatory-sequential, mixed-methods approach.

My research plan had three basic components to inform the three research questions. First was the descriptive component, finding the means and variances of cadet commitment to their development as LOC and to USAFA as an organization. The second component was to determine to what extent this variation could be explained by various factors (e.g., demographics, motivations and perceptions of organizational effectiveness). The third component sought to understand *how* and *why* certain variables were seen as significant in explaining variation in commitment levels. The three components aligned with the two phases and three research questions within this study. Phase 1 used a survey to answer Research Questions 1 and 2, and Phase 2 used semistructured interviews with cadets to address Research Question 3.

Research Questions

The specific purpose of the study was to understand the cadet commitment at USAFA, and the factors correlated with commitment levels, as well as providing a deeper understanding of *how* and *why* these findings exist. The research questions that drove this methodological approach were:

1. To what extent are cadets committed to their development as LOC and to USAFA as an organization?
2. To what extent, if any, can variation in the commitment levels of cadets at USAFA be explained by select demographic and programmatic variables?
3. Why and how are certain factors correlated with commitment levels at USAFA?

The first two questions were answered by phase one of this study through survey data collection and quantitative regression analysis. Per the explanatory-sequential design, the third research question was refined after completion of the analysis during phase one. Phase two of the study used semistructured interviews and thematic analysis to answer the third research question.

Research Design

The explanatory sequential design is a two-phase approach, starting with a quantitative phase followed subsequently by a qualitative phase (Creswell & Clark, 2018). This methodology uses quantitative research first to acquire and analyze useful data (i.e., in this study, surveys), followed by qualitative research (e.g., semistructured interviews) to explain the quantitative data including typical (or atypical) results, significant results, outlier results, and surprising or confusing results (Creswell & Clark, 2018). This design is most useful under certain conditions, all of which were present for this study including: the researcher and research problem were more quantitatively oriented, quantitative instruments were available, resources were limited and

necessitated a design where one type of data were collected at a time, and finally, the researcher had the time to execute a two-phase study (Creswell & Clark, 2018).

During Phase 1 of the study, I used a realist ontological framework and positivist approach to predict general patterns using precise measurement and deductive reasoning. I employed a 58-question survey using primarily a 5-point Likert scale along with multiple-choice questions for data collection seeking to confirm and build upon existing commitment literature. For Phase 2 of this study, I used semistructured interviews to gather data. During this phase of the study, I used a nominalist ontological framework seeking to carefully consider individual interpretations within their given context with an interpretive social science epistemology. This approach contributed to more meaningful dialogue and provided the opportunity to better understand how cadet perception of commitment is socially constructed. This was imperative to account for the unique context of USAFA, the diversity of cadet experiences, and the lens they use to interpret their experiences.

Site and Participant Selection

Considering the purpose of the study was to understand commitment levels of cadets at USAFA, participants for both phases came from within the cadet population, however the method of participant selection varied by phase.

Phase 1: Quantitative (Survey)

For phase one, the intent was to send the survey to the entire USAFA cadet population to maximize the validity of the results. The survey for this study was approved by USAFA's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to be sent to all cadets during Designated Survey and Assessment Time (DSAT) in mid-April 2020. The protocol for DSAT is for each cadet to receive an email with links to surveys they are asked to complete on their electronic devices (e.g., phone

or computer) during the allocated DSAT day. The survey administered to the cadets can be found in the appendices (see Appendix A).

Phase 2: Qualitative (Semistructured Interview)

The design of this research approach requires integration of the quantitative results to implement the qualitative phase. The selection process for the interviews during phase two was determined after completion of Phase 1, because it is predicated on the results from the quantitative component (Creswell & Clark, 2018). The goal was to have representation on the core demographic variables: gender, race/ethnicity, and class year. Based on the quantitative outcomes, a few demographic variables required further examination, specifically: gender, class year, prior-enlisted cadets, and USAFA prep school graduates. These factors were helpful in determining the number of interviews as well as the questions for the interviews.

Data Collection Procedures

Phase 1: Quantitative (Survey)

As previously noted, the quantitative phase of this study involved administering a 58-question survey using primarily 5-point Likert scale responses along with a few multiple-choice questions (see Appendix A). This survey was developed in Qualtrics and transferred to SurveyMonkey for storage and analysis, as it is the preferred survey mechanism used at USAFA. The survey office at USAFA then sent a link to the survey within the DSAT email to all participating cadets. Results were extracted from SurveyMonkey and exported into Microsoft Excel for data analysis in SPSS software.

Variables

The dependent variables (DV) for the quantitative part of study was the cadet's level of commitment to their development as LOC and the moderating variable (MV) was cadet's level

of commitment to USAFA as an organization. Commitment was measured using the Klein Unidimensional Target-free (KUT) commitment construct measure explained in this section. The MV for this survey was individual cadet commitment to USAFA as an organization using the same organizational construct. Many independent variables (IV) were used in this study, with perceived organizational performance using the Denison Organizational Culture Survey (DOCS) using the most survey questions. DOCS concentrates on four key drivers of organizational performance: involvement, consistency, adaptability, and mission (Denison & Mishra, 1995). The additional IV used from the literature include personal characteristics such as motivation for coming to and staying at USAFA, identity components (e.g., athlete, student, cadet, Airmen), demographics (e.g., gender, race/ethnicity, age/time in organization), and environmental characteristics (e.g., squadron).

Commitment Construct Definition. The commitment literature uses a wide range of commitment constructs (Yahaya, 2016). To effectively determine which tool best measures commitment, it is critical to use a precise commitment construct.¹ The KUT construct restricts the definition of commitment to a distinct type of bond defined as “a volitional psychological bond reflecting dedication to and responsibility for a specific target” (Klein et al., 2012, 2014, p. 130).

Commitment Measure Construct. The KUT commitment construct is unidimensional and target-free. This construct employs a four-item measure based on a conceptual definition with three notions: dedication (how dedicated a person is), volition (to what extent has a person chosen), and responsibility for the target (to what extent does a person care; Klein et al., 2014).

¹ Chapter 2 of this dissertation provided an in-depth justification for why the KUT commitment construct was appropriate for this study.

The measurement in the survey asked four 5-point Likert-style questions with answers ranging from “not at all” to “extremely.” This scale was used to measure cadet commitment to their development as LOC as well as their commitment to USAFA as an organization.

Perceived Person-Fit Measure. Cable and Judge (1996) created a perceived person-organization fit 3-item measure to assess employee’s perception of their fit within an organization. They found this measure to be extremely reliable with a Cronbach alpha of .87. The 3-item measure of person-organization fit showed positive correlation with employee perceptions of their person-job fit, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and willingness to recommend the organization to others (Fields, 2013). This study used Cable and Judge’s 3-item measure to determine three person-fit components: person-supervisor fit, person-group fit, and person-organization fit. The nine person-fit questions used a 5-point Likert scale with responses ranging from “not at all” to “completely.”

Organizational Performance Measure. The Denison Organizational Culture Survey (DOCS) is based on a theory of cultural effectiveness concentrating on four key traits that drive organizational performance: involvement, consistency, adaptability, and mission (Denison & Mishra, 1995). Many studies have indicated that, in general, the highest performing organizations find ways to empower and engage their people (involvement), facilitate coordinated actions and promote consistency of behaviors with core business values (consistency), translate the demands of the organizational environment into action (adaptability), and provide a clear sense of purpose and direction (mission; Denison et al., 2012). This construct employs 36 questions, nine for each of the four traits. The survey had 27 of the DOCS questions, nine for involvement, consistency, and mission. The answers ranged on a 5-point Likert scale from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” Each of these traits had three subconstructs:

involvement is comprised of empowerment, team orientation, and capability development; *consistency* is comprised of core values, agreement, and coordination/integration; and *mission* is comprised of strategic direction/intent, goals/objectives, and vision (Denison et al., 2012). The fourth trait, adaptability, was not measured because cadet perception of USAFA's bureaucratic hierarchal military structure likely has marginal variation. It is important to note this tool does not measure actual organizational performance, but individual perceptions of the organization.

Phase 2: Qualitative (Semistructured Interviews)

Phase two of this study required an additional IRB approval. The IRB approval allowed me access to the Spring 2020 DSAT where I created a short 3-question survey to acquire a list of cadets willing to participate in interviews. From that a list was created by class and gender, followed by a stratified random sampling to narrow the list to 34 cadet interviews: nine for the upper two classes (five male, four female) and eight per class for the lower two classes (four male, four female). An additional snowball sampling was planned if the 34 interviews failed to have racial diversity. However, no snowball sampling was required.

A questionnaire was built with seven main open-ended questions and additional probes to use for the cadet interviews (see Appendix B). Open-ended questions allowed cadets to highlight the factors they considered significant in how committed cadets are to their development as LOC as well as to USAFA as an institution. This approach provides the benefit of limiting the scope of the interview, while allowing for the interviewees to provide thoughtful insights in their answers through open-ended questions (Glesne, 2016). The ordering of the questions was intended to create a logical flow and reduce bias with the questions going in order:

1. Tell me about what brought you to USAFA.
2. Tell me about your experience at USAFA.

3. What do you think about USAFA's mission focus of developing Leaders of Character?
4. From your perspective, how committed are other cadets to their development as LOC?
5. How has your commitment to USAFA as an organization evolved since coming to the Academy?
6. Form your perspective, how committed are other cadets to USAFA?
7. How well is USAFA doing with diversity and inclusion? What evidence could you cite to support your answer?

The first two questions were focused on motivation. The third and fourth questions were focused on gaining a more thorough understanding of cadet commitment to developing as LOC. The fifth and sixth questions were focused on gaining a deeper understanding of cadet commitment to USAFA. The seventh question was added as an exploratory question due to the Black Lives Matter and wider social justice movement that came to the forefront of our societal context amid the research timelines. Finally, if any of the cadets interviewed were prior enlisted or USAFA prep school graduates, additional questions were asked. For a full list of all questions and the associated probes, review the semistructured interview questionnaire in Appendix B.

Data Analysis Procedures

Phase 1: Quantitative (Survey)

The survey produced a cross-sectional data set examined through SPSS software for statistical analysis to understand the variation of commitment levels based on many variables including: gender, race/ethnicity, time at USAFA, reason for coming to/staying at USAFA, identity, leadership, and perception of organizational effectiveness. Factor analysis was

performed to evaluate the underlying structure and to analyze the quality and reliability of the survey questions. Using regression analysis for Phase 1 provided four basic outcomes. First, it showed the strength of relationship between the DV (e.g., individuals' commitment to developing as LOC) and the IV (e.g., squadron number). Second, regression analysis provided the ability to predict or estimate cadet commitment levels based on these IVs. Third, it provided the opportunity to identify errors in the prediction model. Finally, the model revealed the impact of a 1-unit change of an IV on the level of cadet commitment. A list of variables used for the quantitative component of this study (i.e., survey) are listed in Table 2.

Table 2

Survey Variables

Survey Question Number	What type of variable are they?	What factor is being measured?	What category of antecedent?
1	IV	Four USAFA Mission Element Components- Identity	Individual Characteristics
2 to 3	IV	Reasons for Coming/Staying at USAFA- Motivation	Individual Characteristics
4 to 7	DV	Individual Commitment to Developing as LOC	Target
8 to 16	IV	Perception of Organizational Effectiveness (Involvement)	Organizational Factors
17 to 25	IV	Perception of Organization Effectiveness (Consistency)	Organizational Factors
26 to 35	IV	Perception of Organization Effectiveness (Mission)	Organizational Factors
36 to 39	MV	Individual Commitment to USAFA as an Organization	Target
40 to 48	IV	Person-Squadron/Organization/Supervisor Fit	Interpersonal Factors
49	IV	Demographics Gender	Individual Characteristics
50	IV	Demographics Class year	Individual Characteristics
51	IV	Demographics Age	Individual Characteristics
52	IV	Squadron Leadership	Interpersonal Factors
53 to 54	IV	Race/Ethnicity	Individual Characteristics
55 to 56	IV	IC/Sport	Individual Characteristics
57 to 58	IV	Prior Service	Individual Characteristics

Phase 2: Qualitative (Semistructured Interview)

The data acquired through the interviews was analyzed to better understand the factors associated with cadet commitment, as well as how and why they are associated with commitment. Analyzing commitment through multiple data sets enhances validity of the results using triangulation (Patton, 2015). This research project looked at cadet commitment both quantitatively and qualitatively. Within the qualitative phase, looking at numerous sources to determine consistency of responses further strengthened validity. Interviews were manually transcribed within the oTranscribe website tool, which reduced the speed and allowed for more effective transcription. Thematic analysis of the data was done within the NVIVO software to identify themes and patterns. The only initial coding categories used were based on the qualitative questions asked and included: motivation, commitment to developing as LOC, commitment to USAFA, and diversity and inclusion. The nodes or subcategories were developed inductively and were created during analysis. After coding was completed, Trint automated transcription software was used to log each interview. Each quote cited in Chapter 5 of this dissertation was verified with this word-for-word transcription tool.

Using the explanatory-sequential mixed-method design enhanced the findings from this study. Analyzing the quantitative data from the surveys produced many significant findings, some of which informed the structure and design of the qualitative phase. Analysis of the interviews provided a deeper understanding of commitment and the factors associated to commitment at the personal, interpersonal, organizational, and societal levels.

CHAPTER 4: QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS

The intent of this dissertation was to answer a few central questions related to cadet commitment at the U.S. Air Force Academy (USAFA). Now that the justification and context for this study have been provided, the relevant literature has been reviewed, and methodology explained, we can examine results. These three main research questions drove this research:

1. To what extent are cadets committed to their character development and to USAFA as an organization?
2. To what extent, if any, can variation in the commitment levels of cadets at USAFA be explained by select demographic and programmatic variables?
3. Why and how are certain factors correlated with commitment levels at USAFA?

These questions were best addressed using an explanatory sequential mixed-methods approach. This chapter addresses the first two research questions through analysis of the survey results from Phase 1 of research. Chapter 5 provides findings from Phase 2 of the research with a focus on the third research question.

Procedures

The quantitative data used for this analysis was extracted from a survey created in Qualtrics and converted to SurveyMonkey as SurveyMonkey is USAFA's preferred survey interface for cadets. The 58-question survey was reviewed and approved by the Academy's survey office (A90), then vetted through the Academy's Institutional Review Board (IRB) process. After IRB approval, A90 requested an active link to the survey. They placed the link into an email along with other surveys that were sent to part of the Cadet Wing during the Dedicated Survey and Assessment Time (DSAT). DSAT is time dedicated by USAFA for cadets

to take part in research projects for the Academy. USAFA allocated 10 days for cadets to voluntarily self-administer the assigned Spring 2020 DSAT surveys virtually.

The email provided a short description of the purpose of the research and a link to the survey. The survey was titled USAFA Organizational Effectiveness, with a short description stating, “This survey is intended to gain insight into how USAFA fosters or hinders cadets’ level of commitment to their character development and to USAFA as an organization.” Owners of each survey were required to send periodic updates to A90 informing them of the number of cadets who had completed the survey to gauge overall participation. At the end of the 10 days, the DSAT was complete and final participation numbers were shared with the survey office.

Sampling

The intent and expectation of this study was to provide access to the survey for all 4,000+ cadets. Due to concerns associated with COVID-19, USAFA decided to quarantine all seniors graduating in the spring of 2020 and send home the lower three classes for the remainder of the spring semester. During the first 2 weeks of quarantine, two seniors died by suicide. Senior leadership of the U.S. Air Force (USAF) and the superintendent of USAFA developed many measures to improve morale during that challenging time including shortening school timelines, moving up graduation, and removing seniors from official DSAT participation. Though seniors were not officially a part of the DSAT, I used a convenience sampling and sent the survey link to a handful of seniors I knew. Some of them used a snowball sampling and sent the link to a group of friends.

Cadets from the lower three classes (i.e., 2021, 2022, and 2023) were sent home and finished the school semester virtually. Trying to stay current with a rigorous academic workload combined with distractions associated with being home created many challenges. One challenge

was logistically using the Academy's Virtual Private Network (VPN). This VPN was not designed to be used by so many people in various locations simultaneously. This created significant challenges including long processing timelines due to bandwidth limitations. The bandwidth limited access to approximately 150 people at a time with over 3,000 cadets using the VPN service. However, from discussions with cadets, challenges associated with COVID-19 and the climate surrounding the cadet deaths played a much larger role in lack of cadet participation. As one cadet plainly put it, "I didn't participate [in the DSAT] and if I had to guess why it was because the surveys were the last thing on my mind during that time with the pandemic and 2020er [senior] suicides" (M. Roca, personal communication, December 18, 2020). Additionally, incentivizing cadet participation has historically played an important role in cadet participation (M. Jackson, personal communication, October 18, 2020). With cadets being home during the DSAT, there was no ability to provide incentives for cadet participation. All of these factors combined to significantly reduce participation rates.

Although the DSAT historic response rates range from 18–75%, the Fall 2019 DSAT had an overall response rate of 25% and was largely attributed to cadet protest over the new commandant's policies and lack of incentives provided for participation (J. Russell, personal communication, October 19, 2020). The overall Spring 2020 DSAT participation was even lower at about 18% and was largely attributed to the combination of COVID-19 limitations and lack of incentives provided (J. Russell, personal communication, October 19, 2020). A9 confirmed my survey was sent to the lower three classes, but the ability to track access was challenging under the COVID-19 conditions. The link to this survey was accessed by 287 cadets with 230 cadets completing the 58-question survey (see Appendix A) for a completion rate of 81%. Though 81% of cadets who accessed the survey completed it, only about 5.5% of the entire Cadet Wing took

the survey. The expected response time was 10 minutes, and the overall average response time was 6 minutes, 41 seconds. This indicates cadets as a whole spent limited time thinking about individual questions, with an average response time of 7 seconds per question. Another important consideration was to determine how representative this sample was of the Cadet Wing.

Demographics

Class Year

The seniors were not officially a part of the DSAT and thus are drastically underrepresented in this sampling. As shown in Table 3, the sampling had representation from lower three classes, with the largest participation from the freshman.

Table 3

USAFA Survey Participation by Class Year

Class year	Cadet population	Sample
4-degree (freshman)	26.2%	38.3%
3-degree (sophomore)	25.6%	28.3%
2-degree (junior)	25%	24.3%
Firstie (senior)	23.2%	9.1%

Note. Cadet population is from the 2019 Wing Strength.

Gender

The Academy male-to-female ratio is approximately 3-to-1 (Wing Strength, 2019). Thus, even with more men completing this survey than women, there was an overrepresentation of women in this sampling (see Table 4)

Table 4*USAFA Survey Participation by Gender*

Gender	Cadet population	Sample
Male	72.30%	60.90%
Female	27.60%	37.80%
Prefer not to answer	N/A	1.30%

Note. Cadet population comes from the 2019 Common Data Set.

Race/Ethnicity

Approximately 31% of cadets at USAFA identify as racial-ethnic minority as of October of 2020 (Wing Strength, 2019). This sample had an overrepresentation of cadets who selected Asian American, Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders, or White as their primary race/ethnicity. This sampling had an underrepresentation of cadets who identified Hispanic/Latino or Black/African American as their primary race/ethnicity. This sampling had no cadets who listed American Indian their primary race/ethnicity. Table 5 provides the racial/ethnic representation in this study.

Table 5*USAFA Survey Participation by Race/Ethnicity*

Race/Ethnicity	Cadet population	Sample
Hispanic/Latino	10.90%	8.90%
Black or African American	6.60%	3.90%
American Indian	0.25%	0.00%
Asian American	5.90%	7.00%
Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0.51%	0.90%
White	65.10%	80.00%
Other	7.40%	N/A
Unknown/Decline to State	3.10%	N/A
Race/Ethnicity	Cadet population	Sample
Self-identified as “minority”	31.00%	20.00%
White	69.00%	80.00%

Note. Cadet population is from the 2019 Common Data Set and Wing Strength.

Age

USAFA has strict age admission parameters. Admission requirements include being at least 17 years old and no older than 23 on the first of July of the year a person enters USAFA (USAFA Admissions, n.d.) so the age range for cadets at USAFA is 18–27. This study had an overrepresentation of cadets from 18–21 years of age and an underrepresentation of cadets over 22 years old (see Table 6).

Table 6

USAFA Survey Participation by Age

Age	Cadet population	Sample	Sample	Sample
18-19	31.20%	38.80%	18	11.0%
			19	27.8%
20-21	46.10%	57.80%	20	24.8%
			21	23.0%
			22	7.8%
22-29	22.80%	12.50%	23	1.7%
			24 & older	3.0%

Note. Cadet population is from the College Factual website.

Prior Military Service

Approximately 15% of USAFA cadets are graduates of USAFA’s preparatory school (Wing Strength, 2019). Additionally, about 6% of USAFA cadets are USAF prior enlisted, some who also attended USAFA’s preparatory school (Wing Strength, 2019). This survey attempted to look at other forms of prior military service (e.g., Junior ROTC, Civil Air Patrol) and their relationship to cadet commitment. These demographics, however, are not tracked by USAFA. Overall, this survey sampling had an underrepresentation of both USAFA prep school graduates and USAF prior-enlisted cadets (see Table 7).

Table 7*USAFA Survey Participation by Prior Military Service/USAFA Preparatory School*

Prior Military Service	Cadet population	Sample
USAFA Prep School	15.00%	6.90%
USAF Prior Enlisted	5.90%	4.70%
Any Prior Military Service	Not Measured	23.50%

Note. Cadet population is from the 2019 Wing Strength.

USAFA Intercollegiate Athletes

Cadets who are designated with intercollegiate athlete (IC) status ranges from between 18–21% (USAFA Athletics, 2020). This study had an overrepresentation of IC, with over 30% of respondents being IC (see Table 8).

Table 8*USAFA Survey Participation by Intercollegiate Athletes (IC)*

Intercollegiate Athlete (IC)	USAFA Population	Sample
Non-Intercollegiate Athlete	80.20%	69.60%
Intercollegiate Athlete	19.80%	30.40%

Note. Cadet population is from the 2020 USAFA Athletics website.

After careful review of many components of cadet demographics combined with the small sample size, all results from the quantitative portion of this study should be seen as preliminary findings requiring further validation through subsequent research for confidence to generalize to the entire cadet population at USAFA. With that said, the sample is large enough to provide some significant findings to be further explored in the second phase of this research project for collective findings and takeaways.

Data Preparation

At the conclusion of the 10-day survey window, the survey was closed in SurveyMonkey and exported into Microsoft Excel for data preparation. The first step was removing all erroneous

fields (e.g., IP address, consent approve). The second step was converting all survey answers from words to numbers and categories for analysis in the SPSS statistical software. These data conversions were conducted for all four variable types: nominal, ordinal, interval, and ratio. The nominal variables used in this study included personal characteristics and demographics including gender, race/ethnicity, squadron, motivation for coming to/staying at USAFA, intercollegiate sport, and prior military service. These categorical answers were each replaced with a numerical representation (e.g., 0 = *male*, 1 = *female*, 2 = *prefer not to answer*). A few personal characteristics were converted numerically under the ordinal category due to their clear order, specifically age and class year (e.g., 1 = *Senior*, 2 = *Junior*, 3 = *Sophomore*, 4 = *Freshman*). The final two variable types, interval and ratio, are classified as scale variables in SPSS.

Cadets at USAFA possess four personal identities corresponding to the four main mission elements at USAFA and were asked to prioritize them from first to fourth (e.g., first – Student; second – Athlete; third – Cadet; fourth – Leader of Character). From this question, many identity variables were created including most important and least important identities, which were treated as interval variables. Finally, ratio variables included the commitment, person-fit, and organizational effectiveness measures. There were four commitment questions for each of the two commitment targets (e.g., commitment to development as a leader of character and commitment to USAFA). Each of these questions had a 5-point Likert scale ranging from not at all to extremely. The answers were converted to a numerical equivalent (i.e., 1 = *not at all*, 2 = *slightly*, 3 = *moderately*, 4 = *quite a bit*, 5 = *extremely*). An overall commitment score was created and an average of those four questions with a total score ranging from 4–20 and average range from 1–5. I then used the same process of data conversion for the person-fit measure.

The person-fit measure had nine questions split into three categories: person-group, person-supervisor, and person-organization. Each of the nine questions used a 5-point Likert scale rating from not at all to completely. These answers were converted numerically (i.e., 1 = *not at all*, 2 = *slightly*, 3 = *moderately*, 4 = *mostly*, 5 = *completely*). An average of the three subcategories and an overall person-fit average were created as additional variables. Finally, the largest portion of the survey was the perceived organizational effectiveness, with 28 questions comprised of 3 of the 4 key traits that drive organizational performance: involvement, consistency, and mission. Each of these traits had three subconstructs: *involvement* is comprised of empowerment, team orientation, and capability development; *consistency* is comprised of core values, agreement, and coordination/integration; and *mission* is comprised of strategic direction/intent, goals/objectives, and vision (Denison et al., 2012). All 28 questions used a 5-point Likert scale (i.e., 1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *somewhat disagree*, 3 = *neither agree nor disagree*, 4 = *somewhat agree*, and 5 = *strongly agree*) with averages created for each component and subcomponent. Each of these variables were used to examine relationship with the commitment constructs.

Missing Values

The survey was designed to encourage cadets to complete the entire survey by not allowing survey completion without answering all 58 questions. This decision was predicated upon the expectation cadets would be highly motivated for the incentives provided for participation. This assumption proved flawed when cadets left USAFA during COVID-19, eliminating any value of incentives. However, the survey design approach eliminated the challenges associated with missing values. Of the 287 cadets who accessed the survey, 230

completed it for a completion rate of 80.1%. The quantitative evaluation was based upon an $n = 230$.

Results

This section first addresses the primary results from the first research question followed by the second research question and finally the additional findings. Due to the complexity in addressing the second research question thoroughly, preliminary results are provided first followed by precise results through regression analysis.

Research Question 1: To What Extent Are Cadets Committed to Their Development as Leaders of Character and to USAFA as an Organization?

Commitment Level to Development as a Leader of Character

Analysis of the sample of 230 cadets yielded an average commitment score for each cadet for two different commitment targets: their development as leaders of character and to USAFA as an organization. The commitment measurement was comprised of four questions using a 5-point Likert scale. The survey provided context for the leader of character target saying:

Character can be interpreted different ways. When answering the following four questions, “character development” means developing as a leader of character who lives honorably by 1) consistently practicing the virtues embodied in the Air Force Core Values; 2) lifts people to their best possible selves; and 3) elevates performance toward a common and noble purpose. *Commitment* is defined as a desired psychological bond reflecting dedication to and responsibility for a particular target (i.e., your character development).

The four questions measuring cadet commitment to their development as leaders of character included:

1. How *committed* are you to your character development?
2. To what extent do you *care* about character development?
3. How *dedicated* are you to your character development?
4. To what extent have you *chosen* to be committed to your character development?

Cadet responses to these four questions were combined to create a total score then divided by four to create an average commitment score to the specific target, developing as a leader of character. The descriptive results for cadet commitment to their development as leaders of character are provided in Table 9 with associated histogram graph (see Figure 8).

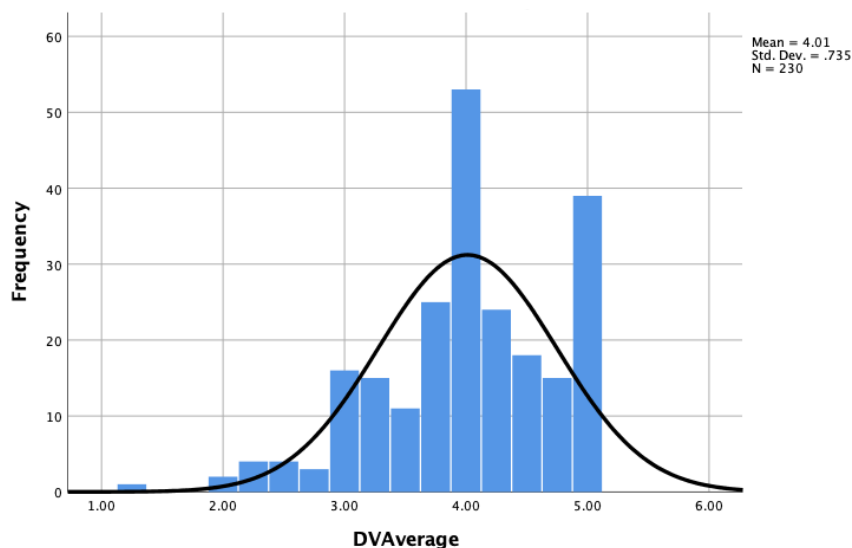
Table 9

Descriptive Statistics: Cadet Commitment to Their Development as Leaders of Character

Commitment to Developing as LOC	<i>n</i>	Minimum	Maximum	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mdn</i>	Mode
Total Commitment Score	230	5	20	16.1	2.94		
Average Commitment Score	230	1.25	5.00	4.01	0.735	4	4

Figure 8

Cadet Commitment to Their Development as Leaders of Character



The descriptive dataset indicates cadets as a whole are quite committed to their development as leaders of character with a mean commitment of 4.01. However, the range of cadet commitment is significant with a smaller portion of cadets having extremely low commitment levels. For another viewpoint on the data, I categorized each cadet into one of 3 levels of commitment to their development as leaders of character: low, moderate or high. Based on the terms used in the 5-point Likert scale, cadets with an average commitment score of 2.75 or lower were categorized as low or marginally committed; those with an average commitment score of 3.00-3.75 were classified as moderately committed; and those with an average commitment score from 4.00-5 were classified as highly committed. Another way of framing cadet commitment to their development as leaders of character is approximately two thirds of the cadet sample are highly committed, almost one-third are moderately committed and approximately 1 in 20 cadets have low commitment to their development as leaders of character. This characterization is displayed graphically in Table 10.

Table 10

Level of Cadet Commitment to Their Development as Leaders of Character

Cadet Commitment Developing as a Leader of Character	Number of Cadets	Percentage
Low	14	6.09%
Moderate	67	29.10%
High	149	64.78%
Total	230	100%

Cadet Commitment to USAFA as an Organization

Measuring cadet commitment to the USAF Academy as an organization used the same 5-point Likert scale. Context for defining commitment preceded the four commitment questions with the statement, “Commitment is defined as a desired psychological bond reflecting

dedication to and responsibility for a particular target” (see Appendix A). The four questions were slightly different than the commitment questions for developing as a leader of character to account for the different target type. The four questions were:

1. How *committed* are you to USAFA as an organization?
2. To what extent do you *care* about USAFA as an organization?
3. How *dedicated* are you to USAFA as an organization?
4. To what extent have you *chosen* to commit to USAFA as an organization?

Cadet responses to these four questions were again combined to create a total score, then divided by 4 to create an average commitment score to the specific target, USAFA as an organization.

The descriptive results for cadet commitment to USAFA is presented in Table 11 with associated histogram graph (see Figure 9).

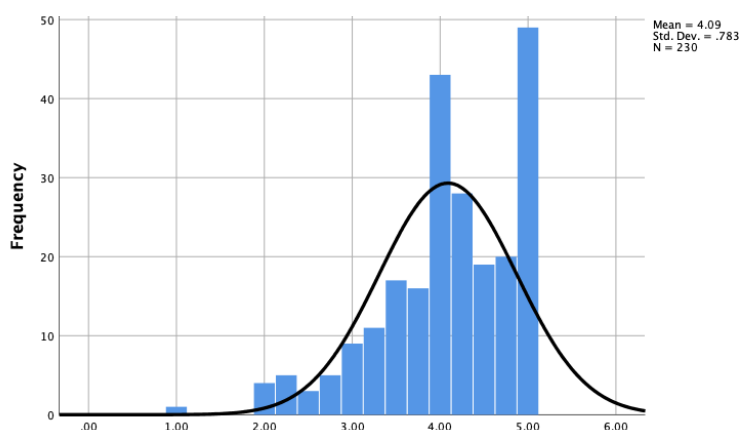
Table 11

Descriptive Statistics: Cadet Commitment to USAFA

Commitment to	<i>n</i>	Minimum	Maximum	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mdn</i>	Mode
Total Score	230	4	20	16.4	3.13	4.25	4
Average Score	230	1.00	5.00	4.09	0.783		

Figure 9

Cadet Commitment to USAFA as an Organization



The descriptive data set for cadet commitment to USAFA similarly indicates cadets as a whole are quite committed with a mean commitment of 4.09. However, the range of cadet commitment is extreme ranging from the lowest possible score of one all the way to the highest possible score of five. Cadets were again placed into 1 of 3 categories of commitment based on their composite score: low (1-2.75), moderate (3.00-3.75) or high (4.00-5.00) commitment to USAFA. More than two thirds of the cadet sample were highly committed to USAFA, almost one quarter of the sample were moderately committed to USAFA and approximately one in 15 cadets had low commitment to USAFA as displayed in Table 12.

Table 12

Level of Cadet Commitment to USAFA as an Organization

Cadet Commitment Level to USAFA	Number of Cadets	Percentage
Low	18	7.80%
Moderate	53	23.04%
High	159	69.10%
Total	230	100%

Collectively, the sample of cadets are strongly committed to USAFA and to their development as leaders of character. There is reason to assume this is the upper bound for USAFA population, given the circumstances surrounding participation (e.g., voluntary participation during COVID-19 and lack of incentives). Additionally, this sample showed a huge variation in cadet commitment with the range from not at all to extremely committed. Another point for further consideration is the sociability bias. Phase 2 of this study was used to triangulate this finding.

Research Question 2: To What Extent, if any, Can Variation in the Commitment Levels of Cadets at USAFA Be Explained by Select Demographic and Programmatic Variables?

Preliminary Analysis of Factors Related to Cadet Commitment to Being Leaders of Character

Within the cadet sample data, many demographic and programmable variables were significantly correlated with cadet commitment to being a leader of character. Personal characteristics with statistically significant correlations included components of identity and motivation, and age, class year, race/ethnicity, and prior service showed no statistically significant correlation with cadets' commitment to their development as leaders of character. Person-fit characteristics and squadron are interpersonal factors that were significantly correlated with commitment. Cadet perception of organization factors related to involvement and consistency were also significantly correlated to cadet commitment. Finally, looking at the interrelationship between cadet commitment to developing as leaders of character (i.e., the dependent value) and commitment to USAFA as an organization (i.e., the moderating value) proved to have a statistically significant, but moderate correlation of .37 at the significance level of $p < .00$. However, paired t -test results failed to provide statistically significant evidence of a difference in means for cadets' commitment to these two targets. Table 13 shows a list of factors with statistically significant correlations to cadet commitment to their development as leaders of character. Appendix C has a full list of all factors used in this study and their correlations to cadet commitment to their development as leaders of character.

Table 13*Factors Significantly Correlated With Cadet Commitment to Development as LOC*

Correlations	Commitment to Development as LOC	Significance (2-tailed)
Commitment to USAFA	Moderate (.37)	0.00
Importance of IC Identity	Low (-.14)	0.04
IC Bottom Identity	Low (.17)	0.01
Importance of Student Identity	Low (-.18)	0.01
Student Top Identity	Low (-.24)	0.00
Importance of LOC Identity	Low (.23)	0.00
LOC Top Identity	Low (.19)	0.01
LOC Bottom Identity	Low (-.15)	0.02
Reason for Coming Location	Low (-.14)	0.04
Reason for Staying (RFS)		
Guaranteed Job	Low (-.23)	0.00
RFS Family Pressure	Low (-.16)	0.00
RFS Desire to Serve	Low (.22)	0.00
RFS Others vs Self Focus	Low (.28)	0.00
Squadron 23	Low (.15)	0.03
Rest of SQs	Low (.14)	0.03
Person-Fit Average	Moderate (.35)	0.00
Person-Supervisor Fit Average	Low (.26)	0.00
Person-Squadron Fit Average	Low (.25)	0.00
Person-USAFA Fit Average	Moderate (.35)	0.00
Org Effectiveness (OE) Avg.	Low (.15)	0.03
OE - Involvement (Empowerment Avg.)	Low (.17)	0.01
OE - Involvement (Capability Dev Avg.)	Low (.15)	0.02
OE - Involvement Average	Low (.16)	0.02

The next step in the incremental process to better understand factors associated with cadet commitment to their development was creating dummy variables to run independent *t* tests of all subcomponents of independent variables to determine if there was a difference between groups within a variable at a significance level of $p < .05$. Independent variables with significant difference of means included some components of identity, motivation, and squadron. Factors showing no mean difference included age, gender, intercollegiate athlete, prior service and race/ethnicity.

Identity was broken down into four components tied to the four mission elements of USAFA: athlete/IC; Airman/cadet/member of the Profession of Arms; student; and leader of character. Because cadets were asked to rank their identities in order of priority, additional variables were created such as most important and least important identity. Cadets who selected student as their most important identity had a lower mean commitment to their development, as did cadets who had being a leader or character as their least important identity. Conversely, cadets who had leader of character as their most important identity had a higher mean commitment.

Motivation was broken down into two types: motivation for coming and motivation for staying. Within these types were nine different sources of motivation for answers. The means for cadets whose motivation was based on location, guaranteed job or family pressure had lower commitment levels, while the mean commitment for cadets whose motivation was desire to serve or service-based were above the mean commitment level.

Due to the limited sample size within each squadron, it was difficult to create a dummy variable for each squadron. Cadet participation by squadron ranged from 2–18 participants. Dummy variables were created for the seven squadrons with eight or more participants and all other squadrons were put into one group. Cadets who participated from a squadron with low participation (i.e., less than eight participants) had a higher mean commitment than squadrons with high participation (i.e., eight or more participants). Cadet commitment averages by squadron had a large range from 3.25 to 4.875. However due to the small sample size no squadron reached the necessary significance level ($p < .05$).

Preliminary Analysis of Factors Related to Cadet Commitment to USAFA as an Organization

Within the cadet sample data, many demographic and programmable variables were significantly correlated with cadet commitment to USAFA as an organization. Personal characteristics with statistically significant correlations to commitment included age, class year, components of identity, gender, motivation, prior enlisted, other prior military service and graduates of USAFA's preparatory school. Personal characteristics that were not significantly correlated to cadet commitment were race/ethnicity and overall prior service. Interpersonal factors with statistically significant correlations to commitment to USAFA included squadron, and person-fit factors. Finally, many components of cadet perception of organizational effectiveness were significantly correlated with commitment to USAFA. Table 14 shows a list of factors with statistically significant correlations to cadet commitment to USAFA as an organization.

Table 14

Factors Significantly Correlated With Cadet Commitment to USAFA

Correlations	Commitment to USAFA	Significance (2-tailed)
Commitment to LOC	Moderate (.37)	0.00
Importance of IC Identity	Low (-.16)	0.02
IC Bottom Identity	Low (.18)	0.01
Importance of Student Identity	Low (-.18)	0.01
Student Top Identity	Low (-.24)	0.00
Importance of Cadet Identity	Low (.21)	0.00
Cadet Top Identity	Low (.17)	0.03
Cadet Bottom Identity	Low (-.15)	0.01
Reason for Coming (RFC) Debt Free Education	Low (-.26)	0.00
RFC Sense of Service	Low (.24)	0.00
RFC Division One Sports	Low (-.17)	0.01
Reason for Staying (RFS) Debt Free Education	Low (-.26)	0.00
RFS Guaranteed Job	Low (-.15)	0.02
RFS Desire to Serve	Low (.18)	0.01
RFS Others vs Self Focus	Low (.21)	0.00
Gender	Low (-.13)	0.05
Class Year	Low (.25)	0.00
Firstie (Senior)	Low (-.20)	0.00
4-Degree (Freshman)	Low (.18)	0.01

Correlations	Commitment to USAFA	Significance (2-tailed)
Age	Low (-.29)	0.00
19	Low (.17)	0.01
22	Low (-.18)	0.01
23	Low (-.21)	0.00
Squadron 8	Low (-.14)	0.03
Rest of SQs	Low (.14)	0.03
Baseball vs Rest of ICs	Low (.24)	0.05
USAFA Prep School	Low (-.21)	0.00
Prior Enlisted	Low (-.16)	0.01
Other Prior Military Service	Low (.14)	0.04
Person-Fit Average	High (.58)	0.00
Person-Supervisor Fit Average	Moderate (.32)	0.00
Person-Squadron Fit Average	High (.50)	0.00
Person-USAFA Fit Average	High (.59)	0.00
Org Effectiveness (OE) Avg.	Moderate (.37)	0.00
OE - Involvement (Empowerment Avg.)	Low (.24)	0.00
OE - Involvement (Team Orientation Avg.)	Low (.25)	0.00
OE - Involvement (Capability Dev Avg.)	Moderate (.33)	0.00
OE - Involvement Average	Moderate (.36)	0.00
OE - Consistency (Core Values Avg.)	Moderate (.30)	0.00
OE - Consistency (Agreement Avg.)	Low (.26)	0.00
OE - Consistency (Coord & Integration Avg.)	Low (.24)	0.00
OE - Consistency Average	Moderate (.33)	0.00
OE - Mission (Strategic Direction & Intent Avg.)	Moderate (.36)	0.00
OE - Mission (Goals & Objectives Avg.)	Low (.20)	0.00
OE - Mission (Vision Avg.)	Low (.26)	0.00
OE - Mission Average	Moderate (.31)	0.00

Note. Appendix D provides a list of all correlations to Cadet Commitment to USAFA.

The next step in the incremental process enhancing our understanding of factors associated with cadet commitment to USAFA was creating dummy variables to run independent *t* tests of the subsets of all independent variables. *t* tests were used to determine if there was a difference between groups within a variable at a significance level of $p < .05$. Independent variables with significant difference of means included certain components of age, baseball IC, class year, gender, identity, motivation and squadron. Prior service, race/ethnicity and IC are personal characteristics that did not have mean differences.

Looking at class year, freshmen were more committed than average to USAFA and seniors were less committed. Additionally, when I did a mean comparison of the top two classes

(i.e., juniors and seniors) to the bottom two classes (i.e., freshman and sophomores) the bottom two classes had a statistically significant higher mean commitment to USAFA. This aligns with age where 18- and 19-year-old groups were more committed than the average while 22- and 23-year-old cadets were less committed to USAFA than the average cadet.

Many components of identity had statistically significant differences of mean commitment to USAFA. Cadets who had Airman/profession of arms as their most important identity were more committed to USAFA and correspondingly cadets who had Airman/profession of arms as their least important identity were less committed to USAFA. Cadets who had IC or student as their top identity were also less committed to USAFA.

Looking at motivational factors examined in this study, cadets whose motivation was free education, intercollegiate athletics, or a guaranteed job were less committed than the mean. Conversely, cadets whose motivation was a sense of service were more committed to USAFA than the mean.

Interpersonal factors with statistically significant difference in mean commitment levels included squadrons and sports teams. Seven of the 40 squadrons had enough participation (i.e., eight or more cadets) to separate category for comparison. The other 33 squadrons were lumped into one additional variable. Squadron 8 was significantly less committed to USAFA than the mean. The rest of the squadrons' group commitment level was higher than the mean. The intercollegiate sports were split into 20 categories. Three sports (baseball, soccer, and wrestling) had enough participation to compare means. Of those, only baseball athletes showed to have a higher mean commitment to USAFA than other cadets.

Commitment Regression Analysis

Though correlations and independent *t* tests provide helpful insights, they have limitations. Although they examine relationships between different variables, they do so without controlling for other factors. Thus, they are far less informative and powerful when compared to regression analysis. Regression analysis controls for other variables in analysis, which enhances confidence in the results and allows for predicting cadet commitment.

Regression analysis was conducted on the sample of 230 cadets by correlating their commitment average with the independent variables (IVs) at the $p < .05$ level. The two commitment targets were treated independently as the dependent variables (DVs). All IVs were initially considered in specifying a model for the prediction of cadet commitment. Seniors and squadron were two IVs with small sample sizes generating discussion on whether or not they should be used as IVs for regression analysis. The other main consideration was whether to run all IVs together or break them into groups.

To maximize inferential robustness, 15 different regression models were created. Three models used all IVs simultaneously: one model had all IVs, one model omitted squadrons and one model omitted seniors. Alternatively, IVs were grouped into three categories: Personal factors designated as Group A, interpersonal factors as Group B, and organizational factors as Group C. This created six order permutations of ABC (ABC, ACB, BAC, BCA, CAB, and CBA). These six models were run with and without squadron as an IV for a total of 12 models there. The following regression analysis was created by analyzing all 15 model variations outlined in Table 15.

Table 15*Different Regression Models Used to Assess Cadet Commitment*

Regression Model #	LOC Commitment Models
1	All data used (seniors included); all variables used (squadrons used as IV); and all variables considered simultaneously
2	Seniors data not included; all variables used (squadrons used as IV); and all variables considered simultaneously
3	All data used (seniors included); all variables used (squadrons used as IV); personal factors (A) considered first, then interpersonal factors (B), then organizational factors (C)
4	All data used (seniors included); all variables used (squadrons used as IV); personal factors (A) considered first, then organizational factors (C), then interpersonal factors (B)
5	All data used (seniors included); all variables used (squadrons used as IV); interpersonal factors (B) considered first, then personal factors (A), then organizational factors (C)
6	All data used (seniors included); all variables used (squadrons used as IV); interpersonal factors (B) considered first, then organizational factors (C), then personal factors (A)
7	All data used (seniors included); all variables used (squadrons used as IV); organizational factors (C) considered first, then personal factors (A), then interpersonal factors (B)
8	All data used (seniors included); all variables used (squadrons used as IV); organizational factors (C) considered first, then interpersonal factors (B), then personal factors (A)
9	All data used (seniors included); squadrons not used as IV; all variables considered simultaneously
10	All data used (seniors included); squadrons not used as IV; personal factors (A) considered first, then interpersonal factors (B), then organizational factors (C)
11	All data used (seniors included); squadrons not used as IV; personal factors (A) considered first, then organizational factors (C), then interpersonal factors (B)
12	All data used (seniors included); squadrons not used as IV; interpersonal factors (B) considered first, then personal factors (A), then organizational factors (C)
13	All data used (seniors included); squadrons not used as IV; interpersonal factors (B) considered first, then organizational factors (C), then personal factors (A)
14	All data used (seniors included); squadrons not used as IV; organizational factors (C) considered first, then personal factors (A), then interpersonal factors (B)
15	All data used (seniors included); squadrons not used as IV; organizational factors (C) considered first, then interpersonal factors (B), then personal factors (A)

Regression Analysis for Cadet Commitment to Developing as LOC. The 15

regression models used between five and seven factors to explain an average 54.9% of the variation in cadet commitment, with model R^2 ranging from .51 to .61. The moderating variable (commitment to USAFA) was not used within these regression models, but when used in a standalone regression explained 5.2% of the variation in cadet commitment. When added as a final step in the models, a wide range of results occurred: no increase in R^2 ; increase in R^2 but

decrease in the adjusted R^2 ; or significant increase in both R^2 and adjusted R^2 (e.g., 11.6% increased R^2 in BAC model). Table 16 provides a summary of all 15 models.

Table 16

Regression Models for Cadet Commitment to Their Development as Leaders of Character

LOC Commitment Models	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Std. Error of the Estimate	Significance Level	# of Factors in Model
1 (All at Once)	0.59	0.55	0.46	0.00	6
2 (All w/o Seniors)	0.51	0.47	0.50	0.00	5
3 (ABC)	0.59	0.54	0.47	0.00	7
4 (ACB)	0.56	0.51	0.48	0.00	7
5 (BAC)	0.51	0.48	0.50	0.00	5
6 (BCA)	0.61	0.57	0.45	0.00	7
7 (CAB)	0.53	0.48	0.50	0.00	7
8 (CBA)	0.60	0.56	0.46	0.00	7
9 (All at once w/o SQ)	0.55	0.52	0.48	0.00	5
10 (ABC w/o SQ)	0.51	0.47	0.50	0.00	5
11 (ACB w/o SQ)	0.51	0.47	0.50	0.00	6
12 (BAC w/o SQ)	0.51	0.48	0.50	0.00	5
13 (BCA w/o SQ)	0.55	0.52	0.48	0.00	5
14 (CAB w/o SQ)	0.53	0.48	0.50	0.00	7
15 (CBA w/o SQ)	0.56	0.52	0.48	0.00	6
Average of All Models	0.55	0.51	0.48	0.00	6

Note. Appendix E provides tables of all 15 leader of character commitment models with the estimated coefficients, standard errors, Beta coefficients, t statistics and significance levels.

All three categories of antecedents matter with individual and interpersonal factors being used in all 15 models and organizational factors mattering in 13 of the 15 models. Organizational factors were drowned out, however, when all factors were used simultaneously, and in one of the four models when organizational factors were the third step of the model.

Interpersonal factors explained the most of the three factor categories representing on average 29.57% of the variation with person-fit factors being the most important prediction variable accounting for 23.57% of the variation. *Person-fit* factors were used in all models and were the first and most powerful variable in all models when measured concurrently and always possessed a positive coefficient. Two thirds of the models used the overall person-fit average

explaining 24.36% of the variation with an average positive coefficient of .65 suggesting a 1-unit increase in person-fit average score results in an increased commitment to developing as a LOC of .65 (commitment is on a 5-point scale). One third of the models used individual person-fit questions with a positive coefficient ranging from .22-.27, suggesting a 1-unit increase in fit response to those individual questions results in an increase of commitment of .22-.27. Person-fit factors are a key variable predicting cadet commitment. The two other interpersonal factors with predictive benefit were *intercollegiate sport* represented in all models and *cadet squadron* used in five of the eight models it was measured in. Squadrons and intercollegiate sports both had cases with positive coefficients and cases with negative coefficients. Baseball had a negative coefficient (-.44) while other sports had a positive coefficient (.35) suggesting baseball players are .44 less committed to their development as LOC than the average cadet while other ICs are .35 more committed than the average cadet. One squadron had a positive coefficient (.85) while another had a negative coefficient (-.55) suggesting cadets in Squadron 29 are .85 more committed the average cadet while cadets in squadron 10 are .55 less committed. What is clear is the subgroup environments at USAFA (e.g., sports team, squadron) affect cadet commitment to their development as leaders of character.

Individual and organizational factors combined had less predictive value than interpersonal factors, which had an average R^2 of 12.77% for individual factors and 12.51% for organizational factors. Individual factors providing predictive benefit included *age*, *motivation* for staying at the Academy and *identity*. Athlete or intercollegiate identity chosen as the least important identity was used in 40% of the models with a positive unstandardized coefficient (.21) suggesting cadets who see their athletic identity as the least important are .21 more committed than the average cadet. When a guaranteed job was the motivation for staying at

USAFA, this factor was used in 60% of the models with an average negative coefficient (-.57) suggesting cadets who have stayed at USAFA for the guaranteed job are .57 less committed than cadets who have stayed for other reasons. *Age* was used in 60% of the models with age 18 having an average estimated coefficient of -.56 in eight of the models, and age 21 having a positive coefficient (.33) in one of the models suggesting 18-year-old cadets are .56 less committed than the other cadets while 21-year-old cadets are .33 more committed.

Of the organizational factors tested in this study, five questions related to cadet perception of USAFA's organizational effectiveness provided predictive benefit. The five questions were:

1. Everyone believes he or she can have a positive impact (Involvement—Empowerment Question 3)
2. Being at USAFA is like being part of a team (Involvement—Team orientation Question 1)
3. USAFA has long-term purpose and direction (Mission—Strategic direction and intent Question 1)
4. USAFA has an ethical code that guides our behavior and tells us right from wrong (Consistency—Core values Question 4)
5. People from different organizational units still share a common perspective (Consistency—Coordination and integration Question 1)

These questions were predictors in 13 of the 15 models tested, with each model using between one and three questions and providing an average R^2 of 12.51%. Two questions fell under the category of involvement: *empowerment* and *team-orientation*. The empowerment question was used in one model with a positive unstandardized coefficient (.14) suggesting a 1-

unit increase in cadet's perception of empowerment resulting in a .14 increase in commitment level. The team orientation question was used in 40% of the models with a positive coefficient (.05), suggesting a 1-unit increase in cadet's perception of feeling like USAFA is a team results in a .05 increase in commitment. During preliminary analysis, I ran an independent *t* test on this question by gender and there was a significant difference, with females believing more strongly they are part of a team at USAFA. The consistency category of organizational effectiveness was used in 11 of the 15 models using one of two questions: *core values* Question 4 or the *coordination and integration* Question 1. The core values Question 4 was used in eight of the 15 models with an average coefficient of -.26 suggesting a 1-unit increase in cadet belief that USAFA has a code governing ethical behavior result in a .26 decrease in commitment. The coordination and integration Question 1 was used in 20% of the models with an average negative coefficient of -.15 suggesting a 1-unit increase in cadet perception that USAFA share the same perspective results in a .15 decrease in commitment. These results suggest the more cadets believe USAFA is consistent in ethical code and common perspective, the more their commitment to developing as leaders of character decreases. The *strategic direction and intent* question under the mission subcategory of organizational effectiveness was used in eight of the 15 models with an average positive coefficient (.33) suggesting a 1-unit increase in cadets' belief that USAFA has a long-term strategic plan results in a .33 increase in cadet commitment. More detailed examination of this question through t-tests showed significant differences on this question based on certain demographics: females and Hispanics had a higher belief that USAFA has long-term purpose and direction than their counterparts. Table 17 provides a full list of all factors providing value in predicting cadet commitment, how many models they were present in and the unstandardized coefficients.

Table 17*Factors for Predicting Cadet Commitment to Their Development as Leaders of Character*

LOC Commitment Prediction Variables	# of Models Used in	R^2	Unstandardized Coefficient (Average)
Individual Factors	15	12.77	N/A
<i>Age</i>	9	5.50	N/A
Age – 18	8	5.76	-0.56
Age – 21	1	3.40	0.33
Motivation for Staying- Guaranteed Job	9	7.52	-0.48
IC Bottom Identity	6	12.40	0.21
Interpersonal Factors	15	29.57	N/A
<i>Sport</i>	15	4.56	N/A
Baseball IC	13	4.29	-0.44
Other Sport IC	2	6.35	0.35
<i>Squadrons</i>	5	4.32	N/A
Squadron 10	2	3.70	-0.55
Squadron 29	3	4.73	0.85
<i>Person-Fit</i>	15	21.98	N/A
Person Fit Average	10	24.36	0.65
Person-Squadron #3	2	4.05	0.22
Person-Supervisor #1	5	16.68	0.25
Person-Organization #3	3	6.13	0.27
Organizational Factors	13	12.51	N/A
Org Effectiveness (OE): Involvement – Empowerment #3	1	4.50	0.14
OE: Involvement – Team Orientation #1	6	9.23	0.05
OE: Consistency – Core Values #4	8	7.05	-0.26
OE: Consistency – Coord & Integration #1	3	3.77	-0.15
OE: Mission – Strategic Direction & Intent #1	8	7.50	0.33

Summary of Cadet Commitment to Developing as LOC

Many factors provided predictive value for cadet commitment to their development as LOC. Individual factors including *age*, *motivation*, and *identity* all provided predictive value. The more amount of time cadets had been at USAFA was associated with an increase in their commitment as LOC. Additionally, if a cadet's main motivation for staying at USAFA was a guaranteed job upon graduation, they were less committed than the average cadet. Cadets who

selected “athlete” as their least important of the four cadet identities were more committed to their development as LOC.

Interpersonal factors provided predictive value for cadets’ commitment to their development as LOC including their *squadron*, *sport*, and *person-fit*. Given the wide range and statistically significant variation in commitment due to squadron, it is clear that the squadron environment impacts cadet commitment to their development as LOC. On average, baseball ICs were less committed to their development as LOC than the average cadet; though only three of the 27 sports had enough participation to measure the impact of their sport. Other ICs as a collective group were more committed than the average cadet. Person-fit factors provided the most predictive value of cadet commitment. Therefore, cadets whose values aligned with their commander, squadron, and USAFA were more committed than cadets whose values were not.

Organizational factors also provided predictive value in determining cadet commitment to their development as LOC. The stronger a cadet’s perception was of feeling empowered, a part of a team, and believing USAFA had a long-term purpose and direction, the more committed they were. Conversely, the stronger a cadet’s perception was that USAFA has an ethical code guiding behavior, and that sharing a common perspective across units, resulted in lower commitment levels.

Regression Analysis for Cadet Commitment to USAFA. The same 15 different regression models were created to measure cadet commitment to USAFA based on the varying order of IVs, omission of seniors’ data and removal of cadet squadrons as an IV. Predicting cadet commitment to USAFA as an organization was more successful than predicting cadet commitment to their development as leaders of character. This was expected with the preponderance of commitment research to date focused in the organizational context.

Regression models for examining cadet commitment to USAFA used between five and nine factors to explain an average 64.1% of the variation in cadet commitment, with model R^2 ranging from .54 to .70. The other commitment variable (cadet commitment to their development as leaders of character) was not used within these regression models, but when used in a stand-alone regression explained 14% variation in cadet commitment. When added as a final step in the models, a wide range of results occurred: no increase in R^2 ; increase in R^2 but decrease in the adjusted R^2 ; or a moderate increase in both R^2 and adjusted R^2 . Table 18 provides a summary of all 15 models.

Table 18

Regression Models for Cadet Commitment to USAFA as an Organization

Commitment to USAFA Models	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Std. Error of the Estimate	Significance Level	# of Factors in Model
1 (All at Once)	0.69	0.66	0.43	0.00	7
2 (All w/o Seniors)	0.67	0.63	0.45	0.00	6
3 (ABC)	0.62	0.58	0.47	0.00	7
4 (ACB)	0.67	0.62	0.45	0.00	9
5 (BAC)	0.68	0.64	0.43	0.00	8
6 (BCA)	0.70	0.66	0.42	0.00	8
7 (CAB)	0.59	0.55	0.49	0.00	7
8 (CBA)	0.66	0.62	0.45	0.00	7
9 (All at once w/o SQ)	0.67	0.64	0.44	0.00	6
10 (ABC w/o SQ)	0.54	0.50	0.51	0.00	5
11 (ACB w/o SQ)	0.62	0.57	0.47	0.00	8
12 (BAC w/o SQ)	0.70	0.66	0.42	0.00	8
13 (BCA w/o SQ)	0.63	0.60	0.46	0.00	5
14 (CAB w/o SQ)	0.55	0.50	0.51	0.00	6
15 (CBA w/o SQ)	0.63	0.59	0.46	0.00	6
Average of All Models	0.64	0.60	0.46	0.00	6.87

Note. Appendix E provides tables of all 15 leader of character commitment models with the estimated coefficients, standard errors, Beta coefficients, t-statistics and significance levels.

All three categories of antecedents matter with individual and interpersonal factors being used in all 15 models and organizational factors mattering in 13 of the 15 models. Organizational factors were drowned out when all factors were used simultaneously, and in one other model.

Interpersonal factors explained the most of the three categories of factors representing an average of 35.34% of the variation, with *person-fit average* being the main prediction variable accounting for 32.67% of the average variation with an average positive coefficient of .67. Person-fit average was used in all models and was the first and most powerful variable in all models when measured concurrently. *Cadet squadron* was the other interpersonal factor with predictive value and was relevant in all models when it was a factor for consideration. One squadron was used in seven of the eight models and two other squadrons provided predictive value in the other model. The predictive value for the different squadrons ranged between 2.3-4.82%, and two had positive coefficients and one a negative coefficient.

Individual factors were the second-most significant category of predictive factors explaining on average 19.39% of the variation in cadet commitment to USAFA. *Identity* explained on average 10.7% and was used in 13 of the 15 models. All four identities mattered in some capacity but at different frequencies: student identity was used in 12 of 15 models, athletic identity in seven models, cadet/Airman in four models, and leader of character identity in three models. *Motivation* was the second-most significant individual factor in explaining variation of cadet commitment to USAFA, relevant in all 15 models and explaining an average of 8.57% of the variation. Both motivation for coming to USAFA and motivation for staying at USAFA mattered in the regression analysis. Motivation for coming to USAFA was used in all 15 models and explained an average of 5.25% of the variation, while motivation for staying was only used in two of the 15 models yet explained 13.4% of the variation. Motivation types that mattered with positive coefficients were *prestige* and *sense of service* while *intercollegiate athletics*, *guaranteed job* and *debt-free education* had a negative coefficient. *Age* was also a relevant factor used in 40% of the models with 19-year-old cadets having a positive coefficient (.35) and 22-

year-old cadets having a negative coefficient. (-.45). Two additional individual factors were only present in only one of the 15 models: Asian American cadets (.46) and junior cadets (.32).

Organizational factors were the least important group of factors, yet they still explained an average of 11% of the variation in cadet commitment to USAFA and were used in 13 of the 15 models. Individual questions relating to cadet perception of *organizational effectiveness* were used in 60% of the models and explained 7.24% of the variation, and the organizational effectiveness average was only used in four of the models but explained on average 16.4% of the variation in them with an average positive coefficient (.12). Seven of the 28 organizational effectiveness questions provided predictive benefit:

1. It is easy to reach consensus, even on difficult issues (Consistency—Agreement Question 2)
2. We often have trouble reaching agreement on key issues (Consistency—Agreement Question 3)
3. There is good alignment of goals across mission elements (Consistency—Coordination and integration Question 3)
4. USAFA has a clear strategy for the future (Mission—Strategic direction and intent Question 3)
5. Leaders of this organization set goals that are ambitious, but realistic (Mission—Goals and objectives Question 2)
6. Everyone believes they can have a positive impact (Involvement—Empowerment Question 3)
7. USAFA relies on horizontal control and coordination to get work done, rather than hierarchy (Involvement—Team orientation Question 2)

These questions were predictors in nine of the 15 models tested, with each model using either one, two, or three questions and providing an average R^2 of 8.6%. The *consistency* category was present in one third of the models and explained 5.86% of the variation with two agreement questions and one coordination and integration question. The second agreement question was used in 4 of the 15 models with an average negative coefficient of -.12, and its antithesis, the third agreement question, was only used in 2 of the 15 models and had an average positive coefficient of .2. The third coordination and integration question was only used in 1 of the 15 models and had a negative coefficient (-.15).

The *mission* category of organizational effectiveness was present in one third of the models accounting for an average 5.6% of the variation. Two questions from the mission category had predictive value: the third strategic direction and intent question explained 9.1% of the variation in two models with a positive coefficient average (.14), and the second goals and objectives question provided an average of 3.27% prediction in 20% of the models with an average positive coefficient average of .14 as well.

The final category of organizational effectiveness evaluated was the *involvement* category present in one third of the models explaining on average 4% of the variation. The two questions displaying predictive value were the third empowerment question and the second team orientation question. The third empowerment question was present in one third of the models explaining an average of 3.6% of the variation with a positive coefficient (.15). The second team orientation question was only used in one model accounting for 2% of the variation with a negative coefficient (-.12). Table 19 provides a full list of all factors providing explanatory value in predicting cadet commitment, the number of models they were present in and the factors' average unstandardized coefficient in the models of which they were a part.

Table 19*Factors for Predicting Cadet Commitment to USAFA as an Organization*

USAFA Commitment Prediction Variables	# of Models Used in	Average Prediction %	Average Unstandardized Coefficient
Individual Factors	15	19.39	N/A
<i>Age</i>	6	3.20	N/A
Age – 19	1	2.10	0.35
Age – 22	5	3.40	-0.45
Junior	1	2.10	0.32
Asian American	1	2.10	-0.46
<i>Motivation</i>	15	8.57	N/A
Motivation for Coming (MFC) – Prestige	4	5.60	0.46
MFC – Sense of Service	4	5.90	0.22
MFC – Intercollegiate Athletics	11	5.06	-0.46
Motivation for Staying (MFS) – Debt-Free Education	2	4.40	-0.29
MFS – Guaranteed Job	2	9.00	-0.17
<i>Identity</i>	13	10.70	N/A
IC Top Identity	7	4.24	0.53
Student Bottom Identity	12	3.97	-0.41
LOC Identity	2	5.25	-0.13*
LOC Bottom Identity	1	5.30	0.27
POA Bottom Identity	4	11.50	-0.31
Interpersonal Factors	15	35.34	N/A
<i>Squadrons</i>	8	5.00	N/A
Squadron 8	1	2.30	0.61
Squadron 31	1	3.90	-0.95
Squadron 32	7	4.82	0.72
Person Fit Average	15	32.67	0.67
Organizational Factors	13	11.00	N/A
Org Effectiveness (OE):	5	3.60	0.15
Involvement – Empowerment #3			
OE: Involvement – Team Orientation #2	1	2.00	-0.12
OE: Consistency – Agreement #2	4	4.13	-0.12
OE: Consistency – Agreement #3	2	5.10	0.20
OE: Consistency – Coord & Int #3	1	2.60	-0.16
OE: Mission – Strat Direction & Intent #3	2	9.10	0.14
OE: Mission – Goals & Objectives #2	3	3.27	0.14
OE Average	4	16.40	0.12

Note. Identity used reverse scaling (i.e., 1 was most important identity and 4 was least important identity).

Summary of Cadet Commitment to USAFA

Individual factors including *age*, *motivation*, and *identity* all provided explanatory value.

Collectively, the longer cadets were at USAFA, the less committed they were. Additionally,

cadets who have stayed due to the free education or guaranteed job were less committed than other cadets. Two identity categories were associated with higher commitment levels: Cadets whose most important identity was being an athlete, and cadets whose least important identity was being a LOC. Alternately, two identity categories were associated with lower commitment levels than other cadets: Cadets whose least important identity was being a student, and cadets whose least important identity was as an Airman or member of the Profession of Arms. Finally, Asian American cadets were associated with lower levels of commitment to USAFA than other cadets in one of the 15 models.

Interpersonal factors providing predictive value for cadets' commitment to USAFA included their *squadron* and *person-fit*. The environment in the squadron impacted cadet commitment to USAFA as shown by the wide range of statistical significance among squadrons. Person-fit factors were important predictors of cadet commitment to USAFA; cadets whose values aligned with their commander, squadron, and USAFA were more committed to USAFA than cadets whose values were not in alignment.

Organizational factors also provided predictive value for determining cadet commitment to USAFA. The stronger cadets' perceptions of certain organizational factors, the more committed they were to USAFA as an organization, including: their ability to make an impact at USAFA; believing the goals USAFA sets are realistic and achievable; believing USAFA has a clear strategy for the future; and believing the process of reaching consensus is challenging. The stronger cadets' perceptions were of other USAFA organizational factors including ease of reaching consensus on difficult issues; believing work is executed through horizontal control and coordination; and believing USAFA's goals are aligned across mission elements, the less committed they were to USAFA.

Ancillary Findings

Reliability

The validity of quantitative analysis is predicated on the reliability of the measurement instruments used for that analysis. Three existing measurement instruments were used in this study: KUT Commitment measure (Klein et al., 2012), Cable and Judge's (1996) person-fit measure, and the Denison Organizational Culture Survey (DOCS) organizational effectiveness measure (Denison et al., 2012). Cronbach's alpha is a tool to measure the internal consistency of constructs and was calculated for each of these measures. The range of acceptable values of alpha go from .7 to .95, yet a high value of alpha (> 0.90) may suggest redundancies and the need to reduce the number of questions (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). The KUT 4-question commitment measure was used for both DVs. The Cronbach's alpha for the 4-item construct for cadet commitment to developing as a leader of character was .91 and the Cronbach's alpha for cadet commitment to USAFA as an organization was .91.

The Cronbach's alpha associated with Cable and Judge's (1996) nine question person-fit scale was .89. This fit measure was used for its three subconstructs: person-supervisor fit, person-squadron-fit and person-organization fit. The three-question person-supervisor fit measure had a Cronbach's alpha of .90 that increased to .93 without the second question. The person-squadron measure's Cronbach's alpha was .86. Finally, the person-organizational fit measure's Cronbach's alpha was .80 that increased to .89 without the second question.

The DOCS organizational effectiveness measure had a Cronbach's alpha of .94. The involvement component's Cronbach's alpha was .87 with its three subcomponents: empowerment ($\alpha = .67$), team orientation ($\alpha = .84$ that goes up to .87 without Question 2), and capability development ($\alpha = .8$ that goes up to .82 without Question 1). The consistency

component had a Cronbach's alpha of .82 with its three subcomponents: core values ($\alpha = .80$), agreement ($\alpha = .47$ that goes up to .7 without Question 3) and coordination and integration ($\alpha = .69$). It is worth noting agreement Question 3 was the sole question with reverse scoring. This brings doubt to the thoroughness and intentionality of some cadets completing the survey. Finally, the mission component had a Cronbach's alpha of .89 with its three subcomponents: strategic direction and intent ($\alpha = .72$ that goes up to .76 without Question 1), goals and objectives ($\alpha = .76$) and vision ($\alpha = .81$). Overall, three organizational effectiveness 3-question constructs have questionable reliability: empowerment, agreement, and coordination and integration. The agreement construct is unreliable without removing the third question. However, none of the regression models used these three subconstructs with problematic reliability. Table 20 provides the full list of Cronbach's alpha of measures used in this study.

Table 20

Cronbach's Alpha Measures

Measurement Component	Cronbach's alpha (α)	Number of Items
KUT Commitment Measure – Developing as LOC	0.91	4
KUT Commitment Measure – USAFA as an Organization	0.91	4
Cable & Judge Person-Fit Measure	0.88	9
<i>Person-Supervisor Fit</i>	0.90	3
Person-Supervisor Fit (w/o Question 1)	0.93	2
<i>Person-Group Fit</i>	0.86	3
<i>Person-Organization Fit</i>	0.80	3
Person-Organization Fit (w/o Question 2)	0.89	2
Denison Organizational Effectiveness (OE) Measure	0.94	28
<i>OE Involvement</i>	0.87	9
OE Involvement – Empowerment	0.67*	3
OE Involvement – Team Orientation	0.84	3
OE Involvement – Team Orientation (w/o Question 2)	0.87	2
OE Involvement – Capability Development	0.80	3
OE Involvement – Capability Development (w/o Question 1)	0.82	2
<i>OE Consistency</i>	0.82	10
OE Consistency – Core Values	0.80	4
OE Consistency – Agreement	0.47**	3
OE Consistency - Agreement (w/o question #3)	0.69*	2
OE Consistency – Coordination & Integration	0.69*	3
<i>OE Mission</i>	0.89	9
OE Mission – Strategic Direction & Intent	0.72	3

Measurement Component	Cronbach's alpha (α)	Number of Items
OE Mission – Strategic Direction & Intent (w/o Question 1)	0.76	2
OE Mission – Goals & Objectives	0.76	3
OE Mission – Vision	0.81	3

Note. Cronbach's alpha with asterisk (*) have questionable reliability. Cronbach's alpha with double asterisk (**) have poor reliability.

CHAPTER 5: QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

The main intent of Phase 2 of research for this dissertation was to better understand *how* and *why* certain factors correlated with cadet commitment levels at the U.S. Air Force Academy (USAFA). Effectively addressing this question requires integrating the quantitative and qualitative findings, which occurs in the discussion section of chapter six. The findings section of this chapter focuses on enhancing understanding of the first, focused two research questions in Phase 1:

1. How committed are cadets to their development as Leaders of Character (LOC) and to USAFA as an organization?
2. What factors explain variation in cadet commitment?

This chapter discusses the interview selection process, interview procedures, data preparation, interview analysis process, and finally, the interview findings section.

Interview Selection Process

Per the USAFA Institutional Review Board (IRB), the cadet applicant pool was contacted through the Spring 2020 Dedicated Survey and Assessment Time (DSAT). The survey link was accessed by 536 cadets, but only 331 cadets provided their contact information and voluntarily consented to an interview: 52 seniors (35 males/17 females), 23 juniors (14 males/9 females), 60 sophomores (42 males/18 females) and 194 freshmen (130 males/64 females). From that list, interview selection was accomplished through a stratified random sampling process using class and gender to get the desired 34 cadet interviews: nine for each of the upper two classes (five male, four female) and eight per class for the lower two classes (four male, four female). Each cadet on that list was sent a text message saying:

Cadet X, you indicated you would be willing to do an interview with me to help me better understand USAFA's organizational effectiveness. Is there a time in the next week where I could get 30–45 minutes of your time? I graduated in 2002 and understand how constrained your time is. I promise my intent is to gather useful information to make USAFA better when I return this summer to CCLD.²

V/R, JP Lt Col Justin Pendry

All but four of the 34 cadets responded, and a time was agreed upon to conduct a virtual interview via Skype. For the four cases where cadet interviews were unable to be scheduled, the next cadet on the list in the stratified sample was selected. Review of the racial diversity at the completion of the interviews determined the interview process could be concluded.

Interview Procedures

Each cadet was sent a text message with a Skype link for the virtual interview 5 minutes before the scheduled meeting time. All administrative details were provided at the beginning of the meeting including: an introduction of the interviewer conducting the research, an explanation of why they had been selected to take part in the research, the purpose of the study, expectations of them for the interview, benefits of taking part in the study, the voluntary and confidential nature of the interview, request for consent to take part in the interview, and request for consent to record the interview. Once consent was given, the interview was audio recorded for later transcription. Then interviewees were asked if they had any questions. Once all questions were answered, cadets were asked if they were ready to proceed. Once they confirmed their willingness to participate, the interview began.

² USAFA's Center for Character and Leadership Development (CCLD).

Seven open-ended questions were asked with additional subsequent probes based on responses (see Appendix B). At the completion of the survey, the cadet was asked if they were either prior-enlisted or graduates of USAFA's preparatory school. If they responded "yes" to either of these prompts, additional questions were asked to understand how they thought this factor has affected their commitment, if at all. Finally, demographic questions were asked, including race/ethnicity, squadron,³ and any sports or clubs they were affiliated with. Cadets were thanked for their time and offered the opportunity to view the final dissertation once complete. The length of individual interviews ranged from 25–55 minutes. The entire interview process took 12 days.

Data Preparation

Each cadet was given a code for their name by class year, gender, and interview number (e.g., the code for the first senior females interviewed would be C1F1-Cadet, First-class, Female, Interview #1). The cadet code was put into a password-protected Excel document with the interview schedules. Each interview was manually transcribed using the oTranscribe website tool using the questions in the interview template (see Appendix B) and saved by their code. At the completion and transcription of all 34 interviews, transcripts were imported into the NVivo software tool for coding.

Interview Analysis Process

The interviews were analyzed to better understand the commitment construct, the factors associated with cadet commitment, as well as *how* and *why* they were associated with commitment. Basic coding categories were created in NVivo using the Klein unidimensional target-free (KUT) commitment process model factor categories: personal, target, interpersonal,

³ Squadron or squad is the basic unit or grouping at USAFA, 40 cadet squadrons at USAFA.

and organizational and societal. Initial coding categories were based on the qualitative questions asked and included: motivation, commitment to developing as leaders of character, commitment to USAFA, and diversity and inclusion. All factors influencing cadet commitment were inductively placed into subcategories (i.e., nodes) using thematic analysis in NVivo. After multiple rounds of iterative coding, themes and patterns were established. After coding was completed, Trint automated transcription software was used to log each interview. Each cadet quote cited was verified with this word-for-word transcription tool.

Findings

Analysis of the 34 cadet interviews produced 785 codes within four main areas: general commitment statements (5 codes), commitment to developing as leaders of character (218 codes), commitment to USAFA (429 codes), and diversity and inclusion (133 codes). The most frequently used words were commitment (used 469 times), followed by USAFA (376), people (370), cadets (342), development (193), think (364), get (282), want (266), like (231), knows (153), make (138), seeing (132), going (124), focus (122), experience (111), hard (106), perspective (103), opportunity (100), leaders (98), leadership (97), feel (92), help (80), work (80), care (79) change (79), trying (75) and motivation (74). The most frequently used words referenced relationships with people and individual thoughts, feelings, and actions in response to antecedents. While this word counting procedure provided no standalone value, it was a noteworthy observation reinforcing a key point about commitment: it is immensely personalized based on a number of antecedents and how they affect individual perceptions and perspectives.

Research Question 1: To What Extent Are Cadets Committed to Their Development as Leaders of Character and to USAFA as an Organization?

Cadet Commitment to Developing as Leaders of Character

Many interviewees conveyed the idea the majority of cadets care about their own development, but the avenue they use for their development goes unnoticed (e.g., their sports team, club, or hobby). Additionally, many cadets believe it is difficult to decipher accurately who is committed and who is not. Thus, while sociability bias concerns still exist, it was useful to triangulate the quantitative findings of how committed cadets are to their development as Leaders of Character (LOC). The cadet interviews reinforced the quantitative results indicating the majority of cadets are strongly committed to their development with a meaningful minority having low to moderate commitment. Table 21 provides a sampling of comments to represent the range of cadet commitment on a 1-10 scale (see Appendix G, Table G1 for all comments on this topic).

Table 21

Cadet Level of Commitment to Developing as Leaders of Character

ID	Commitment Level to Developing as LOC (1-10 scale)
C2F1	I'm fully committed to being a leader of character.
C4M3	I'm all in.
C2F3	Pretty high, probably a nine or ten.
C3M2	I'd have to say around the eight or nine range.
C1M4	Probably seven or eight.
C4F3	I feel kind of in the middle, like a five or six.
C1F3	It's probably around a five right now. I honestly think I care more than other people.

Although there was little consensus, many cadets described general trends of how cadet's commitment to their development as LOC evolves over time at USAFA. The three main viewpoints were almost equally represented: (a) five cadets believed commitment increases over

time; (b) five cadets believed commitment decreases over time; and (c) six cadets believed it starts strong, goes down in the middle, and then increases again before graduation.

Cadets with the first viewpoint talked about a few key things that fostered commitment to developing as a LOC over time: development requires a willingness to take risks, which increases over time; commitment takes time to fully understand and embrace the mission; and commitment increases over time with the acquisition of freedom, responsibility, and opportunities for leadership.

Cadets holding the second viewpoint identified cynicism, burnout, and lack of incentives as factors decreasing commitment over time. Finally, the third viewpoint saw strong commitment initially due to the excitement of new challenges and the external motivation of being under a microscope, followed by a reduction as academics became harder and less external pressure was put on them; and commitment increased again as cadets were given more leadership responsibilities and saw how close they are to leading as an officer. Table 22 provides sample quotes from one cadet from each of these three viewpoints.

Table 22

How Time at USAFA Affects Cadet Commitment to Developing as LOC

ID	Evolution of Commitment to Developing as LOC Over Time
	Increases
C3M1	I wanted to develop or ... better myself in a way but didn't ... really know what path that would lead me [there]. I didn't realize that it would be character based. ... [I'm] more focused [now] on being the best officer I can be versus the best cadet I can be.
	Starts Strong, Dips, then Finishes Strong
C3M4	That shock from basic, they're [freshman are] a little bit more motivated. ... I know that 4-degree year everybody was a little bit more motivated just because I was a little bit more stressed last year. ⁴ I was definitely more motivated last year than this year to put time in to develop myself ... then it's 3-degrees; You get more freedom and so it [commitment] kind of goes down. I've seen the Firsties are a little bit more motivated ... just because they're now in charge of that squadron, it's theirs ... to shape. I've seen a lot of seniors take a lot of pride in developing the culture of the squad.

⁴ USAFA uses different terms for cadets by class year: Freshman (4-degree), Sophomore (3-degree), Junior (2-degree) & Senior (Firstie).

 Decreases

C4F1

It's a stressful environment. By the time you're a 2-degree and a Firstie ... you just want to be done. At least that's the common thing that I've heard at least around here and especially right now, and I feel like for some like they get that sense of 'senioritis,' and they're just at this point, they're just like whatever it takes really just to get me to graduation, I don't really care, and some of them ... won't do the thing ... that has the most integrity. ... It looks like everybody is just super burned out by the time they're done ... I think it's just stress, tiredness, fatigue, all of that plays a role.

Cadet Commitment to USAFA

One of the main objectives of this study was to better understand how committed cadets are to USAFA as an organization. Gaining consensus on how cadets interpreted USAFA as the commitment target was perplexing as interviews showed a range of interpretations (e.g., leadership, squadron, organization's values). A common theme for cadet commitment to USAFA was either focusing on certain aspects of USAFA (e.g., sports team, airmanship program, clubs) or broadening to a variety of components of the organization (e.g., leading and developing others, squadron, serving operationally). Yet, cadet interview statements indicated the majority of cadets are committed to USAFA, with a consequential minority having low to moderate commitment. One important point to consider when conducting this evaluation was attrition, as one cadet (C3M3) put it, "I would say the higher the class, the more commitment and dedication. . . . [A] lot of people drop out and then that means a more committed population." A small portion of cadets interviewed provided specific statements on their commitment to USAFA. The range of cadet commitment to USAFA is illustrated with quotations in Table 23 (see Appendix G, Table G3 for all comments on this topic).

Table 23*Cadet Level of Commitment to USAFA*

ID	Level of Commitment to USAFA
C3M3	I'm very committed to the Academy. I love the Academy.
C3F2	On a scale of one to ten, I'd say probably a solid eight.
C1M3	I put it at a five.

Note. The scale was from 1-10.

One of the core questions to examine based on phase one of this study was how cadet commitment to USAFA changes over time. Nineteen cadets provided perceptions on how cadet commitment to USAFA evolves over time at the Academy in three categories: increases over time (three cadets); starts strong, dips, then finishes strong (four cadets); or decreases over time (twelve cadets). It is clear some cadet's commitment to USAFA increases over time as they internalize the mission and are valued in their group at USAFA, whether that is in the squadron, sports team, or club. Cadets who saw commitment starting strong, waning, then finishing strong, talked about how commitment to USAFA is strong when cadets arrive but as academics get tougher and the focus goes away from them after their first-year, commitment decreases; then as cadets get closer to graduation and moving to serve operationally, their commitment increases. The majority of cadets saw commitment decreasing over time, citing many factors including: bureaucracy, changes in training, COVID-19, cynicism, lack of empowerment, monotony of activities, unmet expectations, unfavorable experiences, and wearing down from grind of USAFA. Other cadets had unique insight that commitment neither increases nor decreases but just broadens or transfers toward other things including the operational Air Force. Table 24 provides one cadet's perspective from each of these three points of view (see Appendix G, Table G4 for all comments on how commitment to USAFA evolves over time).

Table 24*How Time at USAFA Affects Cadet Commitment*

ID	Evolution of Commitment to USAFA Over Time
	Increases
C3F1	I definitely feel invested here. I'm kind of planting my seeds and I want to see how tall I can grow based on the soil of the Academy.
	Starts Strong, Dips, Then Finishes Strong
C1M3	'The Valley of Despair' it's when you enter any new job position and basically have blissful ignorance at first and then, an event happens where you mess up, maybe break something ... and [you realize] you have no idea what you're doing. Your confidence just plummets, and you stay at the bottom for a while. And then finally, you start to pick up on things and you learn better and then your confidence builds back up, but it never reaches the maximum again because, you always had that experience where you messed up. You come in here blissfully ignorant, and you love the institution. You may hate being here, but you don't know too much about it. Then 3-degree year comes, and you're exposed to all these new things that ... you never really noticed. ... Then Firstie year comes along and you've pretty much accepted everything. You know you can't really change too much. ... [it] kind of smears your soul, but you survive. And then your committed in the end. It all comes to fruition, you get to graduate, you finally accomplish what you came here to do.
	Decreases
C1F2	The Academy before you're here ... you look at it, it's [an] amazing place. Like, wow, they do so much and it's intense. That's how I felt coming into basic and even probably most of my freshman year, but you start to see that a lot of stuff here that doesn't really matter, and in that way, sometimes I find myself not putting a lot of effort into the little things I can slide by in. That's a lack of commitment.

Research Question 2: To What Extent, if any, Can Variation in the Commitment Levels of Cadets at USAFA Be Explained by Select Demographic and Programmatic Variables?

Factors Influencing Cadet Commitment to Developing as Leaders of Character

Cadets conveyed a wide range of factors influencing cadet commitment to their development as leaders of character (LOC). To present a logical sequence, the grouping of these factors start with the individual factors, then interpersonal factors, and finally organizational factors. Almost 50% of cadet statements on factors influencing commitment to developing as LOC were at the individual level in the following categories: *ability and preparedness*; *underlying personality*; *goals and priorities*; *perspectives and person-fit values alignment*. *Interpersonal factors* included *social exchange* and *social influence*. Organizational factors

entailed the following subcategories: *COVID-19, cynicism, lack of empowerment, subcultures, and workload*. Each of these factors is briefly explained with pointed examples.

Ability and Preparedness. USAFA is often touted as bringing in America’s best and brightest. However, in the cadet population, there is a wide range of academic aptitude and prior preparation effecting success given the rigors of USAFA, as stated in the first comment in Table 25. This range of prior preparation and aptitude can pose challenges for cadets, including feelings of inadequacy, feeling like an outsider, and mental health concerns. Some cadets spend all of their available time just to meet basic requirements to remain at USAFA, and lack the capacity to dedicate extensive time to focus on their development as LOC. On the other hand, some cadets find the work at USAFA much more manageable and the extra time is helpful to focus on their development as LOC as stated in the second comment in Table 25. One senior said, “Spending time thinking about who you want to be when you get older, the environment has given me an easier opportunity to develop and think about being a LOC. [I’ve] grown over the years” (see Appendix G, Table G5 for all comments on ability and preparedness).

Table 25

How Ability and Preparedness Affects Cadet Commitment to Developing as LOC

ID	Ability and Preparedness
C2F2	It’s hard to make sure everyone is given the same opportunity when you have such a large variety of people and a large variety of skill levels, especially when you have people coming in that went to these really great schools where they had a lot of government funding and then others that had none. ...You're all competing for the same thing, but some people simply have more advantage than others, and I think as school starts, people start to realize that and they kind of give up.
C1M1	Being committed to developing my own character, it's definitely grown over the years. Freshman year, you kind of figure out school so you can more or less goes through that; at least some cadets can. ... I think just having the ability and the time to think about that kind of stuff is definitely something that's helped me grow.

Personality. Personality development is a combination of traits, states, biological factors and environment resulting in thoughts, feelings and behavior (Roberts, 2009). Cadets identified certain personality traits as influencers of cadet commitment: humility, drive, and grit. The first two comments in Table 26 are examples of cited personality traits. Cadets also discussed instilled values cadets possess before coming to USAFA as antecedents to commitment, as alluded to in the last two comments in Table 26 (see Appendix G, Table G6 for all comments on personality and upbringing).

Table 26

How Personality and Upbringing Affects Cadet Commitment to Developing as LOC

ID	Personality and Instilled Values Prior to Arriving at USAFA
C3F2	There are people I see that struggle every day with everything, and yet ... they're some of the greatest people that I know. I really think it's just depending on a person and what the circumstances do to them. A lot of it is developing grit because they're going through so many struggles, and yet they still are pushing themselves to do better.
C4M2	Things that will hinder my development, ... ego. We all we all have very strong personalities. We're all apparently some of the best and brightest in the country. And that ... makes it hard for people to learn and take feedback, myself included. I foresee that in the future when I'm a 3-degree or 2-degree or even a Firstie, when people say that you're not really doing this right, I'm going to find it hard to understand.
C1M2	A lot of your personal development, a lot of your personal character drive comes from your upbringing, comes from what characteristics you have coming into the Academy. That's what I've seen that's been consistent throughout. ... Social structure or a foundation growing up that instilled good habits in you, that instilled a drive and a desire to learn, and a desire to stick to your morals; the desire to help other people out.
C4M3	Instilled honor beforehand or just a character before you came here.

Goals and Priorities. Many cadets discussed how goals and priorities influence commitment to development. When cadets' goals and priorities are in alignment with USAFA's stated mission, their commitment is perceived to be higher than cadets with different priorities. Table 27 provides a handful of examples of how goals and priorities influence cadet commitment to their development (see Appendix G, Table G7 for all comments gathered on this topic).

Table 27*How Goals and Priorities Influence Cadet Commitment to Developing as LOC*

ID	Goals and Priorities
C3F2	If they really have a solid vision for their future and they have solid goals, I think it really helps them become more committed. And the flip side of that coin is true. If they see it as, 'I'm in college, I'm here to have a good time, five and dive,' ⁵ they're probably not going to develop as much.
C3F3	I see people that are pushing themselves to be better leaders, but I think that there are people here ... for a free education, and then they'll serve for a few years and then they might go choose to do something else, which is completely fine. But I think [if] that's your long-term goal it affects how committed you are.
C3M2	We have so many different people from so many different parts of the U.S. and different parts of the world raised [with] different ways of thinking. I think that leads to a differentiation in priorities. ... I feel like just differentiation and priorities is what causes that large variation in cadets seeming to care ... or to not care.
C4M3	I think it [commitment] has a lot to do with ... your motivation for being here. ... Some people don't always come here for the right reasons. Some athletes come here just to play their sport. I've seen that in my squad. ... A lot of those people aren't as committed to what the Air Force wants us to do, they're just kind of committed to what they want to do, what their sport wants them to do. ... it's different for every person.

Perspectives. Over half of the cadet interviewees provided 33 comments about how personal perspectives, either directly or indirectly, influenced their commitment level.

Perspective, in fact, was the most extensively coded individual factor affecting commitment. As one senior (C1M4) put it, “I think that's a big trend [factors influencing commitment] ...

personal motivation and attitude... [influence] how you look at things.” Further sub-coding revealed four important perspectives fostering cadet commitment to their development as LOC:

(a) seeing opportunities rather than only barriers, (b) seeing the big picture, (c) embracing a growth mindset, and (d) focusing on the collective team rather than exclusively self-interests.

Seeing Opportunities Rather Than Only Barriers. The first part of having a perspective that links to becoming LOC is the willingness to reframe problems into opportunities. One

⁵ ‘Five and dive’ is a term used for cadets who graduate and then serve the minimum commitment of five years.

example provided involved two quite different responses to ineffective leadership. Two freshmen had very different approaches to ineffective leadership, with one (C4M1) saying, “Permanent party . . . make cadets cynical.⁶ . . . They definitely play a pretty big negative factor in how people want to commit to their own development,” and the other (C4F2) said, “Everything that I’ve experienced here has been helping me to develop.” The difference in these perspectives is how they frame the situation: one focused on what is being done to them, while the other focused on how they can grow through even less-than-positive experiences.

Another freshman’s (C4M1) comment reinforces this dichotomy: “You can respond two ways. . . . One is to say, ‘If they can get away with it, then maybe I can too’ and they . . . give up, or you see it another way; I see exactly what not to be like and promise not to be like that.”

Table 28 provides a few additional examples of recognizing opportunities despite difficulties, and Appendix G, Table G8 provides all comments on this topic).

Table 28

Perspective – Seeing Opportunities Rather Than Barriers (How It Affects Commitment)

ID	Opportunities Rather Than Barriers
C1M1	It's difficult to always see it, [to not] see things happening as negative, and I think you get too immersed in the ‘woe is me’ mentality that you stop thinking about, ‘this might suck, but how can I learn from this? How can I become a better person?’
C1M5	I have a different perspective. I grew up in Nigeria ... the Academy feels like a lot of awesome opportunities for me.

Seeing the Big Picture. Many cadets conveyed how situational interactions increased their awareness of, and commitment to, their development as LOC by providing a better understanding of the importance and significance to Air Force operational effectiveness as highlighted in the first comment in Table 29. Additionally, being able to see past short-term

⁶ Permanent Party (PP) are the military members in charge of cadets.

difficulties to the long-term benefits also enhances commitment as noted in the second comment in Table 29 (see Appendix G, Table G9 for all comments on this perspective).

Table 29

Perspective – Seeing the Big Picture (How It Affects Commitment to Developing as LOC)

ID	Seeing the Big Picture
C4F3	There are times where we have briefs or meetings when it actually hits me, when they ... give a real-world example of where they use this in their life ... this actually matters.
C4F1	It may suck right now, but that end result is worth it. One of my favorite quotes is, 'A moment of pain is worth a lifetime of glory.' Being here is kind of that moment of pain., but once you graduate, the experiences and the opportunities you're going to have are so much more worth it. For the people that realize that they're the ones who are like, let's just buckle down, grind through, we'll get this, but for the people that don't necessarily realize that and are just here kind of going through the motions ... not really taking up every opportunity, they're the ones whose commitment is kind of faltering.

Embracing a Growth Mindset. Maintaining a growth mindset in a competitive environment like USAFA is challenging and requires going outside of one's comfort zone, yet this perspective can increase cadet commitment to their development as leaders of character. The spectrum from fixed to growth mindset is wide. Table 30 provides an example of both fixed and growth mindsets (see Appendix G, Table G10 for all comments on growth mindset.)

Table 30

Perspective – Embracing a Growth Mindset (How It Affects Commitment to Developing as LOC)

ID	Fixed Mindset vs. Growth Mindset
C1F1	I'm much more willing to take chances and put myself out there [than I was] as a freshman. I think we all sort of get in the mindset of ... just got to survive another day. Just don't want to get ... called out by upperclassmen ... you just try to survive. I think a couple of experiences or roles here have encouraged me to be more willing to take chances and put myself out there and to not be as concerned about failing in a leadership role ... more of the growth mindset. Just more willingness to fail and take on risk.
C3F1	We're told we're the best of the best and then you get put with all the best of the best and you really start to [be] stratified ... Instead of rising to the challenge [some cadets think] this is just where I fall and it's that set mindset. I don't know why we go from the growth mindset to the set mindset. It may be just be intrinsic threshold that we have when we're faced with challenges.

Focusing on the Collective Team Rather Than Solely Self-Interest. People come to USAFA for a wide range of reasons, most of which are individually focused: free education, prestige, to play division one sports, or often to set yourself up later in life. A sophomore (C3M1) said, “Definitely a variety. Lots of people . . . are definitely here because they can be, and it benefits them on a less inspirational level.” During Basic Cadet Training (BCT),⁷ the focus is on building a team using stress to foster cooperation and teamwork. *Service Before Self* is part of the Air Force core values. This mindset can enhance cadet commitment to their development as LOC. Table 31 provides a few examples of how possessing a collective focus can increase commitment (see Appendix G, Table G11 for all comments on this topic.)

Table 31

Perspective – Focusing on the Collective Team (How It Affects Commitment to LOC)

ID	Focusing on the Collective Team
C4F2	Producing someone [with] character that can lead others ... is the main goal, and to me ... I take that personally. I would want someone that's leading me to have integrity and be brought up under stressful circumstances, so they know how to handle those things.
C4M3	Developing yourself here, it's not all just focused on yourself ... they stress the team aspect so much. I think that if you focus on the team and developing the team, then that actually develops yourself as well, and I think that's a really key part to try and get across here. That's huge.

Values Alignment. *Person-fit* values alignment was the most significant antecedent from the quantitative phase of the study. Although not widely cited by those interviewed, a few interviewees identified values alignment as a factor influencing cadet commitment to their development. Table 32 provides one example of a comment about values alignment and a comment by another interviewee about values misalignment.

⁷ Basic Cadet Training (BCT) is the initial exposure for incoming cadets to prepare for living in the military.

Table 32*How Values Alignment Affects Commitment to Developing as LOC*

ID	Values Alignment
C4F1	The whole idea of mutual respect. ... There's a lot of places, like a regular university [I went to] for a semester last year. ... I've only been here really a couple months, it's a totally different atmosphere here compared to where I was...people here, they care about you. They want you to do well. They want you to succeed...But back at regular school, it was all like very 'me, me, me, me, me.' I'm doing this for myself, it's all about me kind of thing.
C2F4	When I came here bright eyed, bushy tailed, can't wait to serve; have that camaraderie ... and brotherhood within the military. The longer I was here, the less I value that. ... My biggest issue is with like the honor system. ... I understand that there are times when you have to hold your people accountable and make sure they're doing the right thing. At the same time, encouraging snitching on your classmates for like cheating on a test. I don't think that instills trust and communication among your peers. I become cynical just because I've heard of horror stories where people snitch. ... I just don't trust anyone anymore.

Two thirds of cadets cited interpersonal factors, making up about 20% of the cadet comments in two categories: social exchange, and social influence.

Social Exchange. Cadets revealed how individual exchanges with other cadets and permanent party impacted their commitment in different ways. Table 33 provides a pointed example of a positive exchange that fostered commitment as well as a negative exchange that hindered cadet commitment (see Appendix G, Table G12 for all comments on social exchange).

Table 33*How Social Exchange Affects Cadet Commitment to Development as LOC*

ID	Social Exchange
C4M1	During basic I had one of the best leaders I've ever had ... he was the squadron commander ... after a particularly rough day ... he came around and made sure we were doing all right. If you had a personal problem or something that made you feel terrible, he talked to you. That was a really big motivator for me. Our squadron commander, who was incredibly busy ... turned his radio off for an hour talking to us, gave us words of encouragement.
C4F1	Snide comments as we were passing ... Some cadets as they progressed through the chain, some of that power goes a little bit to their head. ... They are at the top of the totem pole at this point. I think sometimes that can get in the way of just being a generally nice person or a good person.

Social Influence. Many cadets expressed how parents, family, other cadets, coaches, or USAFA permanent party have influenced their commitment to developing as a LOC. AOCs were the most frequently mentioned influencer, some fostering commitment and others hindering it.⁸ As a senior (C1M5) said, “I surround myself with people that kind of inspire me to do a little bit better; for people that don't really [commit to their development] I don't talk to them deeply.” The first comment in Table 34 highlights the dichotomy of how good and bad leadership can affect commitment, while the second comment shows how social influence can aid commitment, and the third comment shows how it can hinder commitment (see Appendix G, Table G13 for all social influence comments).

Table 34

How Social Influence Affects Cadet Commitment to Their Development as LOC

ID	Social Influence
C2F1	Leadership, individual leaders make me want to be a better person, but those leaders are usually the people that hold themselves accountable, saying 'you're going to be here for Thanksgiving, I'm going to be here for Thanksgiving.' I'm in the same boat as you versus the leaders that act like an authoritarian and get up and lay out these blanket rules, but I don't really think that they hold themselves to the same standards.
C1M5	Having a bunch of people, friends that ... they wanted something, they saw an opportunity to get it, they knew there was going to be challenges along the way, they kept pushing; just getting to see the same individual still here, pushing it and putting in the work every day to make sure they can get to that goal. It's one of the reasons why I stayed. I would say definitely motivation to peers.
C3F4	I think probably a lot of times it's stuff that goes on at home. If your attention is divided and pulled away, it's a lot harder for you to focus on your own character development and just development as a person in general.

Three fourths of the cadets interviewed made comments about organizational factors affecting their commitment. Approximately one third of all comments about factors influencing cadet commitment to their development as leaders of character were in the organizational

⁸ Air Officer Commanding (AOC) are officers in charge of cadets within a squadron.

category. Organizational factors mentioned by cadets perceived as hindering their commitment were extensive and included the following: a lack of mission focus by other units including the dean of faculty (DF) and the athletic department (AD), lack of opportunities for leadership for the majority of the cadet wing (CW), lack of “Esprit de Corps,” and a culture of cheating. Five organizational components were discussed with regularity: *COVID-19*, *cynicism*, *empowerment*, *subcultures*, and *workload*.

COVID-19. COVID-19 has created several challenges at many levels. Multiple cadets talked about how COVID-19 and associated organizational policies hindered their development opportunities and reduced their motivation for developing themselves as discussed in Table 35 (see Appendix G, Table G14 for all comments on this topic).

Table 35

How COVID-19 Affects Cadet Commitment to Developing as LOC

ID	COVID-19
C4F1	If you had asked me last year when COVID wasn't a thing and there weren't all these restrictions going around, I feel like the answer would probably be a little bit different. I feel like a lot of people are just kind of going through the motions ... I feel like in a normal environment, people would be a lot more dedicated and would be wanting to really improve themselves like they always say, 'one percent better every day.' I feel like especially just mentally, things have been so hard that I feel like everybody ... [has a] common goal, let's just make it through, at this point.
C4F3	I haven't really seen the mission too much ... especially with the COVID environment that we're in. I haven't really been ... trained to be like a leader yet because we just don't have a lot of responsibility. ... We don't do really anything except ... go to class and follow the rules right now.

Cynicism. Most cadets interviewed conveyed cadet cynicism is rampant and indicated a consequential hindrance to their commitment. The majority of explanations for why cynicism is prevalent was based on lack of empowerment, lack of trust, and feeling like they were treated like children regardless of performance. Table 36 provides one explicit statement of how

cynicism decreases cadet commitment to their development as leaders of character (see Appendix G, Table G15 for all comments on cynicism).

Table 36

How Cynicism Affects Commitment to Developing as LOC

ID	Cynicism
C3F2	Some of the things that definitely hinder people trying to develop character would honestly be other cynical people. Cynicism is rampant here.

Empowerment. Empowerment is an important factor for cadet's taking ownership and being committed to their development. Cadets feeling a lack of empowerment was a major theme directly diminishing cadet commitment and effectiveness in developing as a leader of character. Table 37 provides three clear examples cadets feeling a lack of empowerment (see Appendix G, Table G16 for all comments on lack of empowerment).

Table 37

How Lack of Empowerment Affects Commitment to Developing as LOC

ID	Lack of Empowerment
C1F3	I think the Academy does a great job developing followers of character more than anything. We're told we're leading the way ... but there's not a lot of room right now for cadets to be creative.
C2F4	Upper leadership treats us like children ... when permanent party micromanages cadet leadership, that really hinders us learning how to step up and how to lead.
C2M2	Someone said this and it really stuck with me, they said, 'They call USAFA the leadership laboratory, but lately I've been asking myself who it's a laboratory for, because sometimes it feels like it's a leadership laboratory for the AOC who's never been in a command position and now is making decisions that you don't agree with, and you're kind of stuck; the 0-6 whose making these decisions about curriculum, it seems to change every single year ... since I've been here.' ⁹

⁹ 0-6 is the officer rank of Colonel in the U.S. Air Force.

Subcultures. Many cadets mentioned the influence of group dynamics on cadet commitment to developing as leaders of character as conveyed in the first comment in Table 38. Airfield teams, sports, and clubs were often mentioned. The second comment in Table 38 provides a specific example of how subcultures fostered commitment (see Appendix G, Table G17 for all comments on subcultures).

Table 38

How Subculture Affects Commitment to Developing as LOC

ID	Subcultures
C4M4	[Commitment] depends on what group of cadets you're with. ... You can break it up into three groups. You can break them into ICs, ¹⁰ the intellectual ... nerdy group; then you have your hardcore military group, and they don't really intermingle. ICs are very motivated to do their sports, but everything else is just kind of ... they're not really there to [do] ... the culture in general is more just about being lax and ... getting away from the hill. ... ¹¹ I think there are some groups that ... separate themselves from the Academy. You have your intellectual group ... they're not a group of athletes, and it makes it hard for them to carry out even the military duty (e.g., training and parades). That just bothers me personally, because I know I don't understand it, like you're standing ... it's not like it's something hard to do. And then you have your hardcore military group ... they're very into the mission and all that, but sometimes they just go too far. They don't understand that ... we don't become robots because we have a mission ... I think each group misses out. ... they sort of hit their own independent little walls where they're missing out on the development process.
C3F3	I'm in the scholarship program and I'm also down at the airfield, and I'm surrounded by the people that are trying to better themselves and become better leaders that will be able to lead with integrity once they do.

Workload. A few cadets highlighted the importance of having time to reflect and intentionally develop as a leader of character as reflected in the first comment in Table 39. The second comment in Table 39 reveals how workload can wear on cadets and their commitment to their development as a LOC (see Appendix G, Table G18 for all workload comments).

¹⁰ Intercollegiate Athletes (ICs) are cadets who participate in sports at USAFA.

¹¹ The hill is a slang term for the area where the cadet wing resides, and military training is conducted.

Table 39

How Workload at USAFA Affects Cadet Commitment to Developing as a LOC

ID	Workload
C1M1	Being a person of character, being committed to developing my own character, and it's definitely grown over the years. Freshman year ... [you] do school and kind of figure out school so you can more or less get through it.
C3F2	I also think sometimes they place so much on people just across the board and some people can't handle it and it kind of breaks them down a little bit.

This section focused on the many factors affecting their commitment to developing as leader of character in various categories at the individual level (*ability and preparation, personality, goals and priorities, perspectives, person-fit values alignment, interpersonal level (social exchange and social influence), and organizational level (COVID-19, cynicism, lack of empowerment, subcultures, and workload)*).

Factors Influencing Cadet Commitment to USAFA as an Organization

Cadets provided a more extensive list of factors influencing their commitment to USAFA than to their development as leaders of character. Some of these factors also affected cadet commitment to their development, while some were unique to organizational commitment. Mutual *individual factors* included *personal makeup, goals, perspectives; person-fit values alignment; unique demographics based on specific follow up prompts from phase one of the study included: gender, graduates of USAFA's preparatory school, and prior enlistment*. The same interpersonal factors were influential for both commitment targets: *social exchange and social influence*. Mutual organizational factors in the following categories: *COVID-19, cynicism, subcultures, and workload*. Distinctive organizational factors included *communication; hierarchal structure, lack of trust; 47-month program and subcomponents: the curriculum, changes in training, as well as selection and evaluation*. Each of these factors are briefly explained below with specific examples and main themes.

Personality. As discussed with the previous commitment target, personality is a combination of traits evolved shaped through experiences. Drive, dedication, or mindset are components of personality affecting organizational commitment. Table 40 provides two unambiguous examples of how personal make up affects commitment to USAFA (see Appendix G, Table G19 for all comments on personal makeup).

Table 40

How Personality Affects Commitment to USAFA

ID	Personal Makeup Impact on Commitment to USAFA
C2M3	A huge majority of people that come here are type-A people and are driven for whatever reason that they end up that way ... they want to go out and have that internal drive.
C4M3	I'm all in. I try and have that mentality with everything I do. Full commitment; that is how I was raised, how I was developed.

Goals. Several cadets explained how goals have impacted their commitment. Cadets who do not have goals or their goals are not in alignment with USAFA's mission tend to be less committed. Contrarily, having clear goals in alignment with USAFA's vision enhances cadet commitment. Table 41 provides three examples of goals impact cadet commitment to USAFA (see Appendix G, Table G20 for all comments).

Table 41*How Goals Affect Commitment to USAFA*

ID	Goals
C1M5	If they feel as though the Air Force Academy is preparing them for the goals that they have in mind, or at least gives them an avenue to pursue that goal, they're going to be committed.
C2F2	I'm a lot more committed to the Academy now than I was during I-day, ¹² I think because I didn't really know what I wanted to do, and as it's become a lot clearer, I have a goal.
C4M2	My roommate is super committed to this place. It doesn't matter what happens to him, his commitment is through the roof because he has a goal for the Air Force. He wants to be a STO, ¹³ he's doing everything he can, even as a 4-degree, ¹⁴ to get to that point. On the other hand, my other roommate, he doesn't really have a goal for the Air Force. He is here for the free college, and that's all right. He is still a good guy, still doing good in school but the biggest factor for anybody here ... is just do you have a long-term goal other than just graduating from this place. At the same time, I don't have a specific goal in the Air Force or specific job, but I didn't come here to five and dive.

Perspectives. Perspective was the most extensively discussed theme associated with commitment with over three-fourths of the cadets interviewed commenting on how perspective influenced their commitment to USAFA; 61 comments on perspective were made by 26 cadets encompassing almost 15% of the overall coded comments on factors affecting commitment. Cadet perspectives were coded into five main themes related to cadet commitment to USAFA. The first three were perspective themes prevalent for cadet commitment to developing as leaders of character: (a) seeing opportunities rather than only barriers, (b) seeing the big picture, and (c) focusing on the collective team rather than exclusively self-interests. The two distinctive perspective themes for cadet commitment to USAFA were gaps between expectations of USAFA and reality, and perceived locus of control. Many of these perspectives are interrelated.

¹² In processing day or I-day is the first day cadets come to USAFA to begin basic training.

¹³ Special Tactics Officer is a specific special operations career field within the Air Force.

¹⁴ USAFA uses different terms for cadets by class year: Freshman (4-degree), Sophomore (3-degree), Junior (2-degree), and Senior (Firstie).

Seeing Opportunities Rather Than Only Barriers. Most cadets expressed some level of frustration, disappointment, or adversity at USAFA. Ten cadets made comments in this perspective. Table 42 provides three examples of how cadets focused on opportunities amid challenges (see Appendix G, Table G21 for all comments).

Table 42

Perspective – Seeing Opportunities Rather Than Barriers (How It Affects Commitment to USAFA)

ID	Opportunities Rather Than Barriers
C3F2	[Bad things] go on here and I want to see that change and sometimes that just means being a better person and helping others where it's possible myself.
C4F2	COVID has taken away a lot of stuff, which, that's no one's fault and it's good because they're taking measures [to keep us] healthy. ... [Need to] push through 4- degree because that is your worst year. I know it only gets better. I'm still going to have hard times throughout the Academy, but each year I'll get closer with the people around me. I'll have more opportunities to do things. ... I'll be closer to the person I want to be when I graduate.
C4M2	Benefit of COVID and being a doolie in general is you see all of the poor leadership of upperclassmen who think they've been here an extra year and it makes them entitled to be a jerk to you. ¹⁵

Ability to See the Big Picture. Cadets' ability to see the big picture was predicated upon being able to be mindful of the future when struggling during current circumstances. Seeing the long-term value of what the Academy does to, and for them, fosters commitment. Ten cadets conveyed how their ability to focus on the big picture increased their commitment. One cadet (C4M2) provided a caveat that in addition to seeing the big picture, cadets must also be able to focus on the next milestone saying:

¹⁵ Doolie is a freshman at USAFA.

My motivation is just getting my prop and wings.¹⁶ I guess that sounds really shallow, but I'm just focused on getting to the next step. When I came in . . . I was like I'm here to be 2nd Lt. . . . That's still there but what I think about on a day-to-day basis after I did poorly on a Russian exam or some sort of failure, I just think about I have to keep my chin up for the next few months and get to that next milestone.

Table 43 provides four comments on the how seeing the big picture aids cadet commitment to USAFA (see Appendix G, Table G22 for all comments).

Table 43

Perspective – Seeing the Big Picture (How It Affects Commitment to USAFA)

ID	Seeing the Big Picture
C2M4	This is more so a means to an end, but it's definitely not the 'end all be all' kind of thing. I think some other folks struggle quite a bit; they don't have the perspective of what happens when they leave here, and if this is all you knew, you didn't know how the military operates outside of this place could definitely be pretty disheartening for some folks. ... I think it's where those folks see themselves a decade from now. ... I think that probably the biggest factor is what they see their future as and if they see the Academy benefiting them in the long run or not.
C3F2	A lot of the people struggle and yet they still overcome everything. I think a lot of that has to do with their past and what they see for their future.
C4M2	This place is really hard to stay motivated if you do not see yourself somewhere in ten years or even five years. If you are just here for the education, you are kicking yourself in the chin before you even get started at this place.
C4M4	I feel like my commitment [to USAFA] hasn't changed. ... I think part of that is due [to conversations with] my dad. There's very much a big picture view that I have on what this is, and I know it's four years.

Focus on the Collective Team vs. Solely Self-Interest. A major theme for cadets committed to USAFA as an institution was a sense of responsibility for developing other cadets as indicated to in the first two comments in Table 44 or desire to serve in the operational Air

¹⁶ Cadets receive prop & wings towards the end of their freshman year signifying their acceptance into the cadet wing.

Force as discussed in the final two comments in Table 44 (see Appendix G, Table G23 for all comments).

Table 44

Perspective – Focusing on the Collective Team (How It Affects Commitment to USAFA)

ID	Individual vs. Collective Perspective
C1M5	I definitely am committed to helping make it [USAFA] better even after I'm gone. ... I'm actually the squadron commander for my squadron right now. I feel like I'm trying to do my best to invest as much into the underclassmen as much as possible just to make sure that, they feel a little bit more prepared than I am by the time they're getting ready to commission and feel like the institution has actually prepared [them] as opposed to them having to figure it out by themselves.
C3F1	I could selfishly leave and do what I want to do elsewhere. ... I feel a commitment to helping others stay on track and improve the environment. ... If we fail as a team or as a force it doesn't matter if I'm doing great.
C3F4	Once you come to the Academy and join like the bigger team ... the academy team and the Air Force team, it's a lot easier to get committed and get on board.
C4M3	It doesn't always feel like it now, but ... we're in the military and we're serving the greatest nation on earth. I feel like the American people deserve my absolute best and my teammates deserve my absolute best. That's just where my motivation comes from.

Gap in Expectations and Reality at USAFA. Nine cadets expressed how their commitment has decreased due to unmet expectations. Areas where the reality of USAFA failed to meet expectations included: the image and prestige of USAFA; character, competence, and motivation of its members; and the reduction of intensity in the training process. Part of the gap in expectations and reality is related to COVID-19 policies. Table 45 a sampling of four cadets' whose commitment was affected by the gap between their expectations and reality (see Appendix G, Table G24 for all comments on gaps in expectations).

Table 45

Perspective – Gaps Between Expectation and Reality (How It Affects Commitment to USAFA)

ID	Gap Between Expectation and Reality
C1M1	Definitely when I started out, I kind of had a good feel for how it would be here, because the Falcon [scholarship] kind of prepared me a little bit for the rigors physically in basic and then a little bit academically, but overall, I didn't think academics were as bad as I had anticipated. I definitely had a brighter outlook on this place I'd say coming in here my first year here compared to where I am now.
C1M3	It's ... hypocritical for them to say that you matter, your health is important to us, and then they turn around and say 'no, and the mission matters, so we're going to keep you here. We're going to make sure that you guys graduate,' things like that. It'd be better if they just said, 'Guys, we have a mission to do and that's the most important thing for us right now,' instead of essentially just lying and saying you guys matter the most ... I'd say one major one [factor hindering commitment] for me is how much it looks like public image matters a whole lot to the Academy and that's something that I didn't really think would [be] such a large factor in the decisions that the Academy would make. I thought being another military institution they'd kind of shoulder off the opinions of the public because we know what's right, we know what's better, and that's what we're going to do. That is kind of not what's going on. It's kind of turned me away from it a little bit [e.g., football games and marching] things like that, ... seems like you don't value the time of your people and you're using us as kind of like a pony show.
C1M5	Firsties lost a little bit of the commitment in the system. We feel like we were not prepared for our jobs. ... A lot of us felt like you just came and told us like a couple of weeks before it was time for us to put in our job requests or job applications ... new rules that you have to follow through to get this job, even though they realize that they didn't prepare us for those rules ... to get this job that was never told to us before.
C3M1	The biggest change would just be, when you're on the inside and looking at this place from the outside, the Academy does a great job of advertising, so everything looks all glorious from [the] outside and everything is shiny, new, and well run. Then you get here and you kind of get to see ... I probably learned as much about leadership from my superior's failures as I have from what they've actually taught me.

Perceived Locus of Control. Locus of control is closely connected to empowerment.

Locus of control is simply the degree to which people believe they have control over the outcome of events in their lives (Rotter, 1954). Gerrig and Zimbardo (2010) expanded this concept into a locus of control orientation believing outcomes of our actions are contingent on what we do (internal) or events outside our personal control (external). Cadets feeling internal locus of control were more committed than cadets with external locus of control as conveyed in the first three comments in Table 46. Cadets also conveyed how commitment is fostered when

they see the impact of their actions as conveyed in the fourth comment in Table 46 (see Appendix G, Table G25 for all comments on perceived locus of control).

Table 46

Perspective – Perceived Locus of Control (How It Affects Commitment to USAFA)

ID	Locus of Control
C2M5	I think you're going to see a lot of difference between how optimistic a kid is [based on] whether or not they believe they can make some sort of organizational change. Personally, I'm kind of pessimistic as to how much change you can [make] especially as a cadet. Even the most influential position as a wing king, ¹⁷ you only get a semester to effect change. That usually, in my opinion, just gets switched right back when the next wing king or queen rolls around.
C1M1	Cynicism is bred from a feeling of not being able to change the situation you're in, whether that's true or not. I mean, you see it throughout the world today. A lot of people think that they can't change the situation they're in, and so they just complain a lot. I think definitely some of it is attributed to the environment.
C1M5	I feel like from my enlisted time to now, [I] have regressed as an adult, because now I feel like I have to ask for certain things that normally I would have just been able to take an initiative to do when I was enlisted.
C2M3	The diffusion of responsibility is a lot less because it's really hard to justify ... I'm going to get better or I'm going to change this place to for the class of 2026. I don't care about that, but to say I've got 11 kids down at the CFC that I'm teaching how to climb this year and there's going to be 11 to 15 more next year. ¹⁸ That is a number that I can work with ... improve the quality of education for those people.

Person-Fit Value Alignment. *Person-fit* values alignment was an antecedent for both commitment targets. Five cadets talked about how alignment of values with USAFA has fostered their commitment to the institution, as shown in the first comment in Table 47, and misalignment of values reduced cadet commitment as conveyed in the second comment in Table 47 (see Appendix G, Table G26 for all comments).

¹⁷ The highest ranking cadet at USAFA is the Wing Commander, often referred to as wing king or wing queen.

¹⁸ Cadet Fitness Center (CFC) where cadets are able to work out.

Table 47*How Person-Fit Values Alignment Affects Commitment to USAFA*

ID	Values Alignment
C4F1	I just really like [that] everybody here is like-minded in one way or another. I've never been around so many people that think the same way that I do and being able to go to people that are here that know what's going on, that can relate to everything that's just been such a huge thing for me. ... The few [relationships] I have been able to make have been some of the strongest friendships I've ever had, and so that's been really, really nice; and just being around people that understand what you're doing, why you're doing it, because most people back home don't really get it.
C2F4	My biggest issue is with the honor system here. I understand that there are times when you really have to hold your people accountable and make sure they're doing the right thing. At the same time, encouraging snitching on your classmates for cheating on a test; I don't think that instills that trust and communication among your peers.

Gender. More than two thirds of cadets interviewed (24 of 34) provided their perspective of how gender affects cadet commitment to USAFA. All 24 comments fell under two categories: 17 cadets (10 female and seven male) felt females as a group are more committed, while seven (four female and three male) felt there was no difference in commitment. A variety of different reasons were postulated as reasons why females are more committed including: being the minority in a male-dominated career field, feeling the need to prove themselves and gain respect, and requiring greater sacrifice to be at USAFA. Table 48 provides three cadet responses with logical analysis for why females are more committed than males (see Appendix G, Table G27 for additional comments on gender).

Table 48*How Gender Affects Cadet Commitment to USAFA*

ID	Role of Gender in Cadet Commitment to USAFA
C2F2	I'm a little biased here, but I feel generally women are a little bit more committed. That's also because we are the minority and I think sometimes a lot of the women here feel like they have to prove something ... but in some ways, we do have to prove something to their male counterparts. I think a lot of times that women have to prove something to their peers, male cadets, rather than permanent party male officers., but on the other side, sometimes female cadets have to prove themselves to the female officers. ... I think the girls are a little bit more motivated sometimes.
C2F4	A trend that the majority of females are more committed than males. I think that's more because to be a girl and want to go into the military, you got to have more commitment to do that versus a lot of guys who maybe their family tradition [is] to come to an Academy or that's more accepted, where for girls ... you got to really want it.
C4F1	Women ... work a little bit harder to get here initially. ... Back in the day when they first started allowing women to enter the service academies. I kind of feel like in a way that legacy has continued because it's such a male-dominated environment that girls especially now ... if they want to compete with ... the boys that come here, there's obviously a lot more of them. They were top of the top when they were accepted, most of them. ... Among the girls, there is this common competitiveness with the boys to be just as good or better. I feel like because of that, the girls can sometimes be a little bit more focused and driven. ... I really have to kind of fight my way for it ... because we are outnumbered. ... Sometimes the girls are just going to push a little bit harder so that they can get to that ... mutual respect.

USAF Prior Enlisted and USAFA Preparatory School Graduates. Interviewed cadets were asked if they saw any difference in cadet commitment for prior enlisted or USAFA Preparatory School graduates. The answers were relatively distributed, yet a few themes materialized. First, interviewees believed cadets with prior military experience tended to be more critical of USAFA, less serious, more relaxed, and more cynical. Another consistent point was belief in a wide range of commitment.

USAFA Preparatory School. Twelve cadets made specific comments about the effects of graduating from USAFA's Preparatory School; half said they are less committed to USAFA. This position is represented by the first comment in Table 49. Two said there is no difference; one said they are more committed; and three said it is very individualized as stated in the second comment in Table 49. Many cadets discussed how personality, experiences, and demographics

affected cadet commitment, with many cadets conveying USAFA prep school intercollegiate athletes are less committed. Table 49 provides two cadets' perspectives on how USAFA's preparatory school impacts commitment to USAFA (see Appendix G, Table G28 for additional comments on USAFA Preparatory School).

Table 49

How Graduating From USAFA Preparatory School Affects Cadet Commitment to USAF

ID	Role of USAFA Preparatory School in Cadet Commitment to USAFA
C4F2	I have seen a few that maybe their commitment has gone down because they have four more years. They're starting over. I think just that mindset, instead of having a good perspective on it, that they are more prepared. ... I think they get very cynical sometimes. But again, it's very personal. ... I've seen some preppies that are very committed and are very successful.
C1M1	I think the prep schools, they input enough kids every year that it's a really variable group. I've known some to be highly motivated throughout their time here and I've known some that just are here to play sports or just here because there's a way for me to become an officer.

USAF Prior Enlisted. Ten cadets made specific comments about how prior enlistment affects commitment with similar results to the results about those graduating from USAFA's preparatory school: six said they are less committed, one said there is no difference, two said they are more committed, and one said there is a wide range of commitment levels. Many factors shape commitment, but common perceptions resulting from prior enlisted cadets' experiences in the operational Air Force provide them a unique perspective and they are either more appreciative of the opportunities, as the first comment in Table 50 suggests, or more cynical due to reduced empowerment and responsibility combined with questionable applicability of certain training practices, as expressed in the second comment in Table 50 (see Appendix G, Table G29 for all comments on prior enlistment).

Table 50*How Being USAF Prior Enlisted Affects Cadet Commitment to USAFA*

ID	Role of Prior Enlistment in Cadet Commitment to USAFA
C1F3	One of the most positive people I know is prior enlisted. He is so positive, good perspective. His life before was worse and he's thankful for the opportunities. If more took on that perspective, they would get more out of this place.
C1M5	From my enlisted time to now, I have regressed as an adult, because now ... I have to ask for certain things that normally I would have just been able to take an initiative to do when I was enlisted. That would definitely improve the buy in from cadets if they were to treat them a little bit more like adults [over] the progression of cadet careers.

Interpersonal factors in the form social exchange or influence, were by far the least cited category of factors with only 6.5% of comments falling within this category. Less than 40% of cadets interviewed cited interpersonal factors as influencing their commitment to USAFA. One interpersonal theme was the importance of feeling included as a vital factor for cadet commitment to USAFA. Inclusion was important at many different levels: classmates, clubs, squadron, team, and USAFA as a whole.

Social Exchange. Cadet interactions with other cadets, faculty, coaches, and military leadership have enhanced or reduced their commitment to USAFA. Table 51 provides one example of how social interaction can foster commitment and one example hindering commitment (see Appendix G, Table G30 for all social exchange comments).

Table 51*How Social Exchange Affects Commitment to USAFA*

ID	Social Exchange
C2F2	Why I've stayed, I've honestly met a lot of incredible people and the relationships I've made. How it's [my commitment] changed and why it's changed? It's just honestly been my exposure to really good people.
C3F2	The other thing was an incident with an upperclassman that I don't want to get into details with, but I really stopped trusting any sort of upperclassmen at that point.

Social Influence. Nine cadets talked about the influence their peers, subordinates, superiors, or family members had on their commitment to USAFA. Most of these influences enhanced their commitment but a few negatively affected their commitment. It is also worth noting that eight of the nine cadets commenting on the significance of this social influence were female. Table 52 provides one example of how social influence can foster or hinder commitment (see Appendix G, Table G31 for all social influence comments).

Table 52

How Social Influence Affects Commitment to USAFA

ID	Social Influence
C3F2	There was a little bit of exclusion. My class in my squad was pretty clicky, so the groups were very set in stone and I didn't really get a second chance coming out of basic because I really struggled.
C4F1	My coach this year ... she's awesome. Sometimes she'll just come and talk to me and we'll just kind of talk through the day and how everything's going. ... I've definitely figured out the type of leader that I want to be because there's good ones and there's bad ones. I absolutely, through this whole process have really seen what the good ones do and what the bad ones do and why you don't really want to be a bad one.

Organizational factors were by far the largest group of factors cadets cited as influencers of their commitment to USAFA, with 97% of the cadets citing organizational factors.

Organizational factors comprised almost three fourths of all cadet comments on factors influencing their commitment to USAFA. Organizational factors also present for commitment to developing as a leader of character included: *COVID-19, cynicism, subcultures, and workload*. Distinctive organizational factors included *communication; hierarchal structure, lack of trust; 47-month program* and subcomponents: the *curriculum, changes in training, selection and evaluation*.

COVID-19. COVID-19 is an issue that affects all of society. However, cadet comments about COVID-19 were a combination of the effects of COVID itself and USAFA's actions

during COVID. Many cadets conveyed policies associated with COVID-19 present unrealistic expectations, reduce trust, and expose incongruences. For that reason, it is listed within the organizational factors. Table 53 provides two examples of how COVID-19 has impacted their commitment to USAFA (see Appendix G, Table G32 for all comments on social influence).

Table 53

How COVID-19 and Associated USAFA Policy Affects Cadet Commitment to USAFA

ID	COVID-19
C3F3	The atmosphere right now is a lot different than it was last year because of COVID, so I don't really know how that like affects people's answers. ... That is another huge factor, because I think there's a lot more cynicism now.
C4M2	Cadet commitment to USAFA is down, partly due to COVID. ... Commitment is based on the hard experiences and the fun experiences. Right now, ... we are just sitting in our rooms doing school. ... So, people aren't as committed as they could be because they have no ownership of this place. They aren't involved in anything. It's just all over teams [Microsoft Teams]. ... How can you feel committed to a certain place when your whole experience with it is just going to mitch every day?

Cynicism. Seven of the cadets interviewed talked about cadet cynicism as a rampant part of USAFA culture, as alluded to in three examples within Table 54. Many root causes for cynicism were offered, including lack of empowerment, micromanagement, bureaucracy, poor leadership, and incongruences (see Appendix G, Table G33 for all comments on cynicism).

Table 54

How Cynicism Affects Cadet Commitment to USAFA

ID	Cynicism
C1F3	What I immediately think of is the culture around the Academy and the cynicism that isn't necessarily unwarranted, but it's very rampant. I saw that a lot as a freshman and sophomore, and it slowly started bogging me down. I'm thinking coming in, I was like, 'I got this; I'm going to take advantage of every opportunity I can. I am going to take everything seriously,' but when people in your own class start to [say], 'I don't care about that, that doesn't really matter,' you second guess. Then especially when upperclassmen tell you something doesn't matter; it really makes you second guess.
C1F4	I'm still committed to the Academy and what it was made to do. It definitely gets hard with the cynicism; I feel like Firstie year, you're just, you're tired, you're worn out.

ID	Cynicism
C3F3	When I came here, I kind of had an idea that it was this perfect place where everyone was like me and wanted to develop themselves to be the best person they could be... Last year especially, it kind of struck me that that is definitely not the case ... There's a pretty large amount of cynicism ... about any decision that's made ... kind of seeing that creep into my life has made me a little bit ... it's made me notice some of the flaws or difficulties with this place.

Subcultures. USAFA has many subcultures (e.g., airfield programs, clubs, sports, and squadron), but three of the main groups are outlined in the first comment in Table 55. Cadets conveyed how subcultures have different levels of commitment to USAFA. The most frequently discussed subculture was intercollegiate athletes, who collectively were seen as less committed to USAFA as conveyed in the second comment in Table 55 (see Appendix G, Table G34 for all comments on subcultures impact on commitment).

Table 55

How Subcultures Affect Cadet Commitment to USAFA

ID	Subcultures
C1F3	People who focus on academics aren't too likely to perpetuate that culture [cynicism and lack of effort]. People who focus on CW and military, ¹⁹ I think, are the least likely to focus on that culture and will actively speak out against it in the most respectful way. To a degree, some ICs or people who have a LOS status through different clubs and aren't as attached to the [CW] culture on a day-by-day basis are more likely to get that going. ²⁰
C3M1	T-Zo gap; ²¹ ICs answer to AD before [CW]. ²² If we are all cadets, we should all be cadets first and not a football player first, not a basketball player first. ... It seems like as a whole when we had a mandatory event of some sort, Lacrosse didn't have to go to it. We heard about that; it was just not cool. We're cadets first; this is mandatory, we all have to be there.

Workload. Although one senior provided shared the intensity and challenge is what brought and kept him at USAFA, a common opinion was the grind wears people down and

¹⁹ The Cadet Wing (CW) is one of the four mission elements at USAFA.

²⁰ Limited On Season (LOS) status allows cadets to be exempt from certain military duties.

²¹ Terrazzo gap or t-zo gap is a term used for the gap between ICs and the rest of cadets.

²² The Athletic Department (AD) is one of the four mission elements at USAFA.

reduces their commitment. Table 56 provides three examples of how workload reduces cadet commitment to USAFA (see Appendix G, Table G35 for all comments on workload).

Table 56

Comments on How USAFA Workload Affects Cadet Commitment to USAFA

ID	Workload
C1M3	I put it [my commitment] at five [on a 1-10 scale]. Coming [in I was] for sure a ten, fully committed to the Academy... it's just changed over time to kind of beat me down.
C2F4	It's still hard. I think that the grind of the Academy wears on everyone.
C2M5	I don't think that's quite as high a priority, because the tendency here, especially when things get hard ... a lot of people, they get a lot on their plate and they go through their trials and tribulations and they just stick their head down and run, run with their head down and stick their nose to the grindstone. ... I don't think that the commitment exists quite as much on the organizational level because the tendency to just be swamped and focus on getting what you need to get done for yourself is lot bigger of a push factor.

Communication Process. Frustration about the communication process was a consistent cadet topic discussed in great detail. Specifically, as the five examples in Table 57 convey, the lack of transparent communication explaining why things are being done and unwillingness to receive feedback reduce cadet commitment to USAFA. The communication process with cadets has the ability to convey connection and unity or reveal inconsistencies and incongruences. The impact of ineffective communication has been exacerbated by COVID-19 (see Appendix G, Table G36 for all comments on the communication process).

Table 57

How the Communication Process Affects Cadet Commitment to USAFA

ID	Communication Process
C1F2	Feedback is a very big thing and lately I feel there's a huge disconnect between cadets and permanent party.
C1M2	I think hindering the commitment ... everybody wants the full picture of what's going on and how decisions are made, and that's super present right now ... when we're being told to move in the next [COVID] phase. It's limited with the amount of communication of the 'why'
C3M1	Communication has been a big part of it [reduced commitment]. Feeling like I'm ... intentionally kept in the dark sometimes.

ID	Communication Process
C3M4	The majority of the complaints that I've heard ... is a lack of transparency. There's a lot of decisions that get made here that we just have no idea why they're being made. For me, at least, if I know why decisions are being made, I can get on board with it. If I know why something's happening, it's a lot easier to say, OK, I see that reason. I may not agree with it, but at least I know why something's happening.
C4M3	I would say that one of the things that really hinders commitment is just morale in general. Lately, morale seemed pretty low, and I think that just stems from a lack of communication from leadership, because they'll make a decision and then we don't understand the why behind the decision. I feel like that just kind of brings a lot of people down.

Hierarchal Structure. Almost one third of cadets interviewed discussed the hierarchal structure of USAFA as risk adverse, while stifling autonomy, creativity, and innovation as conveyed by the selected comments in Table 58. USAFA is similar to most military organizations using a formal chain of command with narrow span of control and strong centralized authority. This formal structure makes some cadets feel subjugated by superiors as an expendable commodity, thus hindering commitment (see Appendix G, Table G37 for all comments on this subject).

Table 58

How Hierarchal Structure Affects Cadet Commitment to USAFA

ID	Hierarchal Structure
C1M5	[Commitment would be fostered by] the institution giving cadets a little bit more responsibility, because what I've realized is when you treat people like their kids, they tend to act like kids. When you treat people like adults, they act like adults.
C3F2	I think there's a lot of things that leadership could do to be more in touch with reality and more cognizant of how they're using people as a resource and how they're using their time as a resource.
C3M3	The Academy is very structured and there's a lot of things that take up your time. That's good to a certain extent, but I also think you can give more leeway in giving cadets more creativity to make a program. ... I think [it's] key that cadets design their own things, that will definitely promote creativity ... would definitely reduce the cynicism ... and that commitment is going to increase.

Trust. Trust is based on credibility, congruence, consistency, transparency, and relationship. Trust is associated with commitment. One cadet shared increased trust has increased

their commitment as stated in the first comment in Table 59, yet the majority of cadets indicated a lack of trust in their leadership and USAFA as an organization as stated in the remainder of selected comments in Table 59 (see Appendix G, Table G38 for all comments).

Table 59

How Trust Affects Cadet Commitment to USAFA

ID	Trust
C2F2	How it's changed and why it's changed for my commitment level; it's honestly been my exposure to really good people. My trust in the Air Force being a good place, I want to invest my time. I've become more committed when I can trust that it's worth my time.
C1M1	We kind of [have] an inconsistency in how we don't really develop leaders or how it's poorly done. There's a ton of examples of officers not taking responsibility here and upper leadership. ... At least that's the sense that comes off. I just think there's a lot of inconsistency.
C1M3	I watched a Simon Sinek [author] video and the way that you get people to buy into an organization is you gain their trust, and the way you do that is by showing that you care about them. The Academy says people are our utmost concern, people matter the most. It's people, then mission, but their actions aren't aligned with their word. I think that's been exposed much more lately because they've had to do a whole lot of changes and bring in a lot of new stuff with COVID. It's ... hypocritical for them to say that you matter, your health is important to us, and then they turn around and say, 'No, and the mission matters, so we're going to keep you here. We're going to make sure that you guys graduate,' things like that. I think it'd be better if they just said, 'Guys, we have a mission to do and that's the most important thing for us right now.' Instead of essentially just lying and saying, 'You guys matter the most.'
C2F4	I just don't trust anyone anymore. I will give you two perfect examples, especially with all the honor cases that have been happening, like cheating online over COVID. 700 cadets. ... I don't even know how they can justify some honor.
C3M1	I've kind of grown to trust the organization a little less, so my commitment to it has been a little less. ... I trust the big USAFA a little less, but I feel a lot closer to all the individual parts that make it up.

47-Month Program. Over 85% of cadets interviewed provided opinions on how certain components of the USAFA's 47-month program have affected their commitment including: the curriculum; changes in the training process; and selection and evaluation.

Curriculum. At a philosophical level, a common theme from cadets was an overreliance on academics and classroom learning for character and leadership development and a desire to increase experiential learning and hands-on application. One sophomore (C2F4) said it plainly,

“There's a gap in leadership, in teaching leadership there. I don't know if leadership can be taught in a class like that.” A second main theme related to commitment was over the LEAD program and commissioning education (CE) lessons.²³ Cadets said the program has improved over the last year, becoming more structured and organized, but still believe it is rigid with poor assessment, application, and overall value. The final area of concern was with the framework for developing as leaders of character. While cadets want to be better leaders with sound character, the lack of clear link between definition construct and achievable outcomes was challenging. Table 60 provides one comment summing up this overall critique (see Appendix G, Table G39 for all comments on the curriculum's impact on cadet commitment).

Table 60

How USAFA Curriculum Affects Cadet Commitment to USAFA

ID	Curriculum
C2M1	As far as how well we're doing, I think it's a very lofty aspiration and I don't think than ... every single person that graduates is a superb leader of character, but I think it definitely gives you the opportunity to improve yourself as a leader and improve your character and puts you in a lot of situations where there's opportunities for growth. There's a lot of commitment in general to becoming a better leader here. I think the issue is that in general, the military and the Academy doesn't have a concrete definition on what in particular will generate that outcome (e.g., leadership lessons, sports teams, military training). I think because people aren't exactly sure which of those things is the most impactful for them, that leads to differences in priorities across individuals. The most positive impacts, it's part of my experience this past summer, I've just did the CMC program, ²⁴ which is kind of a new thing where they're sending cadets to Higher Mountain College for three weeks of outdoor experience. I thought that was one of the most impactful experiences ... because it put you in an actual environment where failure had consequences. There wasn't unnecessary punishment if you did fail. If I didn't pack a food, I might be hungry ... that really epitomizes that this is a leadership laboratory. I think any opportunity along those lines, experiential learning, especially in the outdoors, is incredibly beneficial.

Changes in Training Process. Over one third of cadets talked about the significant changes in the training from focus on the freshman training to focus training on all four classes.

²³ LEAD and commissioning education is training designated specifically to prepare cadets to become officers.

²⁴ Colorado Mountain College (CMC)

The vast majority of cadets that talked about this topic expressed skepticism and frustration over the changes and a reduction in their commitment to USAFA. They believe USAFA is going in the wrong direction because the new approach fails to properly challenge first-year students to develop character and grit. Table 61 provides three examples of this concern (see Appendix G, Table G40 for all comments on the changes with the training process).

Table 61

How Changes in Training Process Affects Cadet Commitment to USAFA

ID	Changes in Training Process
C1F4	The main thing I hear from other people is the changing of training, because training has changed a ton. I don't know if this is a pattern across every four years that you see the lower classes do this or the upper classes do that. We've noticed that the lower classes, they're just lacking something. It may be from the change of training; they're lacking their commitment to bettering themselves. I remember freshman year I was terrified of doing anything wrong or stepping out of line. I would try to be the best, but then this year, I have noticed a lot of talk back or a lot of people washing out because they're just not committing to what we are doing.
C2F1	The mission itself, it's a good thing to strive for. I'm not so certain we're actually meeting our goals here, especially this year. Beforehand, we were a lot tougher on cadets and I think you're going to find a lot of us upper class cadets ... push [that] training. I thought that built me into somebody who had strength and knew that I could do anything if I put my mind to it. I don't really hear that a lot in the upper classes, especially when I worked basic this past summer. I had cadets that were basics that were complaining about [how] they wanted better food. This institution, at least my class, has built a really gritty future. Officers who care about honor, who have learned it the hard way not to cheat and have integrity.
C2F4	A lot of the upper two think freshman year [is] kind of a joke because it's so easy, comparatively. I think you'll get very different [commitment] results from the upper two and the lower two.

Selection and Evaluation. Forty-five percent of cadets interviewed shared concerns on the selection and evaluation process for cadets and its effect on cadet commitment to USAFA. Selection concerns focused on admitting unqualified cadets or cadets with the wrong motives (i.e., motives that do not align with the USAFA mission or service in the operational Air Force) as alluded to in the first two comments in Table 62. An ancillary selection concern mentioned was limited leadership experiences and positions, where selection is too heavily weighted on

GPA and personal connections. The main evaluation concern was the lack of prioritization and incentivizing developing as a leader of character as expressed in the final two comments in Table 62. A secondary concern with the evaluation process was how narrowly USAFA looks at development (see Appendix G, Table G41 for all comments on selection and evaluation).

Table 62

How the Selection and Evaluation Process Affects Cadet Commitment to USAFA

ID	Selection & Evaluation Process
C1M2	In actuality, before coming here ... I [thought] the Academy was a diamond in the rough. And then when I came here to the Academy ... and I interacted with a lot of the people, I [thought] anyone could get in here.
C4M2	Service before self really needs to be emphasized. I just see so many big egos here and so many people who just want to get their free education and think they're ... the next big thing before they've even graduated. This harms the leader's potential ... Service before self, we say that a lot during basic, ²⁵ but I don't think a lot of people think about it, and that's a different challenge to ... get people to think about it, but people just kind of take for granted that they're here.
C2M5	The things that we're doing that measure success are sought for their own end and we need to understand that they have to be inextricably intertwined with the mission statement, which is being a better person. ... Building virtue, increasing your character, being a more honorable cadet, has to be tied to all the little things that we do here.
C3F1	When it comes down to the day-to-day, people have other priorities and those are reinforced by the institutions in place where academics affects your OPA and because that relates to how you ... ²⁶ get a job. A lot of people put a lot of focus into that. They have to devote more time to achieve their own goals. Cadets as a whole ... they wouldn't say it's not a priority, but they have priorities above it. It ends up getting left behind at times, especially as times get busy.

Cadets provided a more expansive list of factors affecting their commitment to USAFA than to their commitment to developing as leaders of character. These factors were at the individual level (gender; goals; graduates of USAFA's preparatory school; personal makeup; perspectives; prior enlistment; and values alignment), interpersonal level (social exchange and social influence), and organizational level (communication; COVID-19; cynicism; 47-month

²⁵ Basic training or 'basic' is the initial training cadets go through when coming to USAFA.

²⁶ Overall Performance Average is cadets ranking among peers and made up of their Grade Point Average (GPA), Physical Education Average (PEA) and Military Performance Average (MPA).

program and subcomponents: changes in training, curriculum, selection and evaluation; hierarchal structure, lack of trust; subcultures, and workload).

Other Findings

Motivation

Each cadet was asked why they came to USAFA and why they have stayed. A few cadets provided only one motivational factor for being at USAFA: free education (one cadet), flying (three cadets), military affiliation (three cadets), and legacy (four cadets). Twenty-three cadets conveyed their decision to come to USAFA was based on additional factors including: athletics, challenges and opportunities, desire for significance, personal development, community, prestigious education and institution, service, and values alignment. Thirty-one cadets stated their reason for staying as one of the following: development (four cadets); fit (nine cadets); opportunities (seven cadets) and quality of the relationships (nine cadets). Cadets who provided multiple reasons for staying were contained in the factors listed above.

Motivation had five main themes relating to cadet commitment. First, the more motivational factors for being at USAFA appeared to increase cadet commitment to USAFA. Second, the extent of motivational strength for an individual factor (e.g., flying, service, sports team) impacted cadet commitment. Third, the level of understanding and perspective about USAFA before coming fostered commitment. Fourth, the amount of time and purposefulness in preparing for coming to USAFA and the seriousness of the decision to come to USAFA influenced commitment. Finally, commitment was higher when the motivational factors were tied to the USAFA mission or the operational Air Force (e.g., service, flying). The evolution of cadet motivation over time at USAFA fell under one of two categories: it either changed completely or it evolved and expanded since arriving at USAFA.

Emergent Findings

General Insights on Understanding and Measuring Commitment

A few cadet comments provide insight for consideration on measuring commitment. First, commitment is not static; it ebbs and flows over time by situation and circumstance as conveyed in the first quote in Table 63. Second, as discussed in the second and third comments in Table 63, evaluating commitment through observation is challenging and getting a comprehensive understanding requires significant interaction over time. Yet, what people spend their time doing and the amount of effort expended are good indicators. Third, as comments four through six in Table 63 convey, commitment is complex due to the number of potential variables influencing commitment, the individualized impact of these variables, as well as the dynamic interrelationship between different commitment targets (see Appendix G, Table G42 for all comments).

Table 63

General Comments About Commitment

ID	General Commitment Statements
C3M2	Eight or nine ... give me that wiggle room because of natural lulls.
C2F2	Everyone expresses commitment differently and I think sometimes it's hard for me to tell if someone's really committed or not, especially because some people are just cynical. ... It's hard for me to say, but if I were to try to measure it, ... people's motivation and work ethic can sometimes be a telling factor.
C3F1	It's difficult to tell when ... I don't converse with them [other cadets] on a regular basis.
C3F2	Commitment is rooted in trust and belief in values, espoused values lining up with actual lived experiences.
C3F3	It's kind of all over the place depending on if you're committed to your individual development, I think you'll be committed to the institution as a whole and vice versa.
C4F2	I am very committed to the academy because in order to be committed to myself, I have to be committed to the place where I am and it's going to develop me. I'm taking measures to develop myself, but I'm also in an environment that is designed to help me develop. If I'm not committed to that, I can only go so far as an individual.

Insights on Measuring Organizational Commitment

Organizational commitment has been the main focus of commitment research. Accurate measurement of organizational commitment requires a precise definition construct combined with clarity and specificity of the commitment target. The interviews revealed that many cadets interpret this target, USAFA as an organization, in different ways. When asked how committed cadets were to USAFA, a few cadets asked questions about what was meant by commitment to USAFA as an organization? Does it mean commitment to a club or sport; to the squadron; to classmates; to the leadership; to the organization's values and mission; to the rules; or toward the operational Air Force? Cadets also shared how the level of commitment can transfer to components within the organization and broaden as in this study to the operational Air Force. Table 64 provides a selective sampling of comments suggesting uncertainty in the utility of measuring this commitment target (see Appendix G, Table G43 for all comments on this topic).

Table 64

Concerns Related to Measuring Cadet Commitment Levels

ID	Commitment to USAFA Measurement Concerns
C1M2	I would say my commitment to the institution has just been broadened. . . . It's almost at the same level, it's still max, but it feels like it's less because it's almost max on a lot of different areas.
C3M1	My commitment has been a little less [over time], but I'm more committed to subsets. I'm on the club hockey team . . . my teammates, I've grown really close to them and gotten a lot more committed [to them].
C2F1	I wouldn't say that the cadets are committed as much to the Academy as they are to the people and they're committed to their futures and the way they're going to serve when they're joining the operational Air Force.
C2M1	I think commitment becomes very directional, very much like a particular vector that individuals go down in terms of . . . they may be very committed to their kind of tribe . . . whether that be a club or a team or a major or something of that nature.
C2M2	I wouldn't say I think of myself as committed to the institution as much as . . . you could say that I'm committed to the mission of the institution. . . . It's kind of weird for me to think about being committed to the institution.
C4F2	I feel [cadets are] very committed . . . maybe not to the military aspect . . . athletes they're still very committed to the Academy itself because that's where they're playing with their team and their sport.

Cadet Believe in the Value of USAFA’s Mission

Cadets discussed many aspects relating to cadet commitment, including the USAFA Mission. A major trend from cadets was a universal belief in the value of USAFA’s stated mission as indicated in the first two comments in Table 65. Yet many cadets conveyed skepticism in the effectiveness in executing the mission as discussed in the final two comments in Table 65. Furthermore, skepticism tended to increase the longer they had been at USAFA (see Appendix G, Table G44 for all quotes with more context).

Table 65

Statements on USAFA’s Mission – Developing Officers of Character Ready to Lead

ID	Importance of USAFA Mission
C1M1	At face value, I think the mission is very solid. ... Most cadets are pretty bought into that idea, that they want to become people and leaders of character because it's only going to help you. It's kind of a win-win.
C4F1	I think that the mission as a whole is super important. ... We're developing people to go out into society ... and uphold the moral standards. It really ... sets a standard for where the military should be. ... You need to be a morally upstanding person. ... We want to be people that the rest of the world can look up to.
C2M1	It's a very broad goal and ... very difficult to achieve, a high aspiration.
C1M3	I really like the idea of developing leaders of character as long as it's the right character virtue rather than vice.

Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) Perceptions

The context of our society during second phase of this study was rapidly emerging, with national attention on highly visible cases of social injustice and inequity (e.g., Breonna Taylor and George Floyd) amid a global pandemic. In light of that, an additional open-ended question was asked of all cadets interviewed, “How well is USAFA doing with diversity and inclusion? What evidence could you cite to support your answer?” The range of answers and associated insights to this question provided emergent findings with potential for future research.

Each cadet opinion on how well USAFA is doing with D&I was categorized in one of four groups: USAFA's gone too far with D&I (three cadets); USAFA is doing well (16 cadets); it's getting better, but still needs work (four cadets); and it needs to be better (10 cadets). Each cadet provided specific justification as to why they evaluated USAFA's effectiveness in D&I the way they did. The range of perspectives varied based on many factors: definition and interpretation of diversity and inclusion; demographics; expectations and experiences; and prior exposure to D&I before coming to USAFA.

A few key themes emerged from analysis of this question. First, cadets who interpret diversity more narrowly based on gender and race emphasized the lack of diversity at USAFA with a large majority of White males. Cadets (mostly White males) who alleged USAFA is extremely diverse did so based on limited diversity where they grew up or interpreting diversity more broadly as defined by the Air Force: "To include but not limited to: personal life experiences, geographic and socioeconomic backgrounds, cultural knowledge, educational background, work experience, language abilities, physical abilities, philosophical and spiritual perspectives, age, race, ethnicity, and gender" (AFI 36-7001, 2019).

Additionally, diversity expectations are shaped by our past experiences. Two examples of very different expectations of diversity based on their exposure prior to USAFA include: One cadet (C2M2) said, "Diversity we do the one of the best jobs possible in the whole country." Another cadet (C3F3) had an opposing point of view saying, "I grew up in Columbus, Ohio . . . and it was extremely diverse. . . . I think coming here, it was quite a shock because I was nowhere near that level of diversity."

A second key theme was the role of intersectionality in cadet evaluation of how effectively USAFA is doing with D&I. Intersectionality outlines different components of our

identity (e.g., education, race, religion, language, gender, sexual orientation, age, SES) and how each component holds positions of advantage/power/privilege or disadvantage/oppression. The two main components of identity we visually see are gender and race. In listening to cadets' responses to the D&I question, a sharp contrast of perspectives was present based on these two components of identity. Cadets were categorized into four groups based on the intersectionality theoretical concepts: White males (2 privileged components), White females (one privileged/one oppressed), minority males (one privileged/one oppressed), and minority females (two oppressed components). This study is not advocating people based on these components of their identity. However, it was important to analyze how individual perspectives might be primed by demographic factors. Table 66 provides the breakout of cadet perception of how effectively USAFA is doing with D&I based on varying identities (e.g., privileged and oppressed).

Table 66

Cadet Evaluation of How Well USAFA is Performing With Diversity and Inclusion

USAFA D&I Evaluation Category	# of Cadets	Privileged and Oppressed Identities
USAFA Has Gone Too Far	3	2 Cadets w/ both privileges; 1 Cadet w/ 1 of 2 Privileges
USAFA Is Doing Well	16	9 Cadets w/ both privileges; 7 w/ 1 of 2 Privileges
Getting Better, Still Needs Work	4	Full Range—Both privileges; 1 of each; 2 Oppressed IDs
USAFA Really Needs to Do Better	10	6 Cadets w/ 1 Oppressed ID; All 4 Cadets with both Oppressed IDs

Summary

The qualitative research triangulated the quantitative results on cadet commitment levels at USAFA. The majority of cadets were strongly committed to their development and to USAFA, but a consequential minority had low to moderate levels of commitment. Cadet commitment to USAFA strongly trends downward over time for a variety of reasons (e.g.,

bureaucracy, cynicism), while the evolution of cadet commitment to developing as LOC over time at USAFA is more varied.

The quantitative phase affirmed the following antecedents to cadet commitment: gender, graduates of USAFA's preparatory school, person-fit (values alignment), prior enlistment, and subcultures. Antecedents to cadet commitment that emerged during the qualitative phase included a few individual factors such as ability and preparation personal makeup, goals and perspectives as well as numerous organizational factors, including changes in training, COVID-19, communication, curriculum, cynicism, hierarchal structure, lack of empowerment, lack of trust, selection and evaluation, subcultures, and workload. The qualitative phase of research also revealed emerging ideas for future research, including the value of the organization's mission, criteria for measuring commitment targets, and understanding of the varied perspectives on organizational diversity and inclusion.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

The U.S. Air Force Academy (USAFA) aims to produce the nation's best Leaders of Character (LOC) motivated to serve in defense of the United States. This lofty vision requires careful selection, an intentional training program, and effective means of continual evaluation. It requires creating and maintaining a culture that inspires and encourages cadets to make development as LOC their top priority. Organizational effectiveness in executing this mission requires cadet buy-in and commitment, aided by trust in the leadership of the institution.

This explanatory-sequential, mixed-methods study was designed to assess the intensity and range of cadet commitment levels, the main factors influencing the commitment range, as well as how and why these factors are associated with cadet commitment. The research questions informing this study were:

1. To what extent are cadets committed to their development as LOC and to USAFA as an organization?
2. To what extent, if any, can variation in the commitment levels of cadets at USAFA be explained by select demographic and programmatic variables?
3. How and why are certain factors correlated with commitment levels at USAFA?

The insights and perspectives of over 300 cadets were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively to achieve a thorough understanding of commitment at USAFA.

Summary of Quantitative Findings

Research Question 1: To What Extent Are Cadets Committed to Their Development as Leaders of Character and to USAFA as an Organization?

As presented in Chapter 4, Phase 1 of the research found cadets as a whole are highly committed to their development as LOC and to USAFA with a mean of 4.01 and 4.10 (out of

5.0), respectively. However, the range of cadet commitment to both of these targets ranged from “not at all” to “extremely.” Importantly, these average commitment levels may be the higher end of scale because of the circumstances surrounding data collection; with the pandemic ranging, participation became voluntary, and cadets were not incentivized to participate. As a result, the responding sample may be compositionally different than a truly random sample, with participation likely correlated with the underlying commitment and motivation of individual cadets. Interestingly, about one third of cadets sampled had moderate to low commitment to their development as LOC and to USAFA.

Research Question 2: To What Extent, if any, Can Variation in the Commitment Levels of Cadets at USAFA Be Explained by Select Demographic and Programmatic Variables?

Cadet Commitment to Developing as a Leader of Character

Many factors provided predictive value for cadet commitment to their development as LOC including age, identity and motivation. Collectively, cadet commitment to their development as LOC increased over time at USAFA. Additionally, priority of motivations and various identities (i.e., airman, athlete, LOC, and student) influenced commitment. For example, if a cadet’s main motivation for staying at USAFA was “a guaranteed job upon graduation,” they were less committed than the average cadet. Alternately, cadets who chose “athlete” as their least important identity were more committed to their development.

Squadron, sport, and person-fit characteristics were interpersonal factors that provided predictive value for cadets’ commitment to their development as LOC. Given the wide range and statistically significant variation in commitment by squadron, it was clear that squadron environment also impacts cadet commitment to their development as LOC. Although baseball Intercollegiate Athletes (ICs) were less committed to their development as LOC than the average

cadet, only three of the 27 sports had enough participation to measure the impact of their sport. Person-fit factors provided the most predictive value of cadet commitment. Therefore, cadets whose values aligned with their commander, squadron, and USAFA were more committed than cadets whose values were not.

Understanding cadet perceptions of USAFA's organizational effectiveness provided predictive value for determining cadet commitment to their development as LOC. The stronger a cadet's perception of feeling empowered, being a part of a team, and believing USAFA has a long-term purpose and direction, the more committed they were. Conversely, the stronger a cadet's perception that USAFA has an ethical code guiding behavior, or shares a common perspective across units, the lower a cadet's commitment was. The latter two are counterintuitive, and reflect either cadet concern with centralization of control by leadership and execution of the ethical standards at USAFA or are simply Type 1 errors.

Cadet Commitment to USAFA as an Organization

Many common factors provided predictive value for cadet commitment to USAFA including age, identity, motivation, perceptions of organizational effectiveness, person-fit alignment, squadron, and time at USAFA. Cadets who have stayed due to the "free education" or "guaranteed job" were less committed to USAFA than the average cadet. However, certain antecedents impacted commitment targets differently. For example, the longer cadets were at USAFA, the less committed they were collectively to the organization, whereas time at USAFA increased cadet commitment to developing as LOC. Two identities associated with higher commitment levels than the average cadet included cadets whose most important identity was being an athlete, and cadets whose least important identity was being a LOC. In addition, two identity categories associated with lower commitment levels included cadets whose least

important identity was being a student, and cadets whose least important identity was an “Airman” or “member of the Profession of Arms.”

Organizationally, cadet commitment increased when cadets’ perception of their ability to make an impact at USAFA was stronger and was correlated with believing the goals USAFA sets are realistic and achievable, believing USAFA has a clear strategy for the future, and believing that the process of reaching consensus is challenging. The stronger cadets’ perceptions were of other USAFA organizational factors, the less committed they were to USAFA, including the ease of reaching consensus on difficult issues, believing work is executed through horizontal control and coordination, and believing USAFA’s goals are aligned across mission elements.

Summary of Qualitative Findings

Research Question 1: To What Extent Are Cadets Committed to Their Development as Leaders of Character and to USAFA as an Organization?

Level of Cadet Commitment to Developing as a Leader of Character

Consistent with the quantitative findings, data from qualitative interviews with a subset of study participants suggested collectively, cadets strongly believed in the value of USAFA’s mission. However, cadets’ skepticism about USAFA’s focus on and execution of the mission tended to increase over time at USAFA. Cadet interviews reinforced the quantitative results showing the majority of cadets are strongly committed to their development with a meaningful minority having low to moderate levels of commitment.

Level of Cadet Commitment to USAFA as an Organization

The literature on commitment presupposes organizations are a precise commitment target with unvarying interpretation. Cadet interviews showed cadets interpreted USAFA’s organizational target in various ways (e.g., leadership, organizational values, squadron,

team) without clarification, focused on certain aspects of USAFA (e.g., sports team, airmanship program, clubs) or broadened the target to the operational Air Force.

Understanding this dilemma reinforces the need for significant scaffolding when using an organization as the commitment target. Despite these concerns, and consistent with the quantitative findings, cadet interviews indicated the majority of those interviewed are committed to USAFA, with a consequential minority having low to moderate commitment. This generalization was consistent with analysis of the quantitative findings. I found one other similarity between the two data sets: the evidence suggested cadet commitment to USAFA decreased over time.

Research Question 2: To What Extent, if any, Can Variation in the Commitment Levels of Cadets at USAFA Be Explained by Select Demographic and Programmatic Variables?

Cadet Commitment to Developing as a Leader of Character

When prompted for factors affecting commitment to developing as LOC, cadets discussed antecedents at the personal, interpersonal, and organizational levels. These comments were inductively coded into the following categories: ability and preparation; personal makeup; goals and character; social exchange and influence; person-fit values alignment; COVID-19; cynicism; lack of empowerment; subcultures; and workload.

Cadet Commitment to USAFA as an Organization

Cadets identified many common commitment target antecedents including personal makeup, goals and perspectives (at the individual level); person-fit values alignment; social interaction and influence (at the interpersonal level); COVID-19; cynicism; subcultures, and workload (at the organizational level). Yet, cadets identified additional antecedents to organizational commitment including gender, graduating from USAFA's preparatory school,

motivation, and prior enlistment (at the individual level), as well as communication, curriculum, hierarchal structure, lack of trust, selection and evaluation, and training changes (at the organizational level). Organizational factors more strongly affected cadets' commitment to the organization than their development. Additionally, a strong and consistent theme was decrease in cadet commitment to USAFA over time.

Discussion

This study indicates the collective cadet wing has a high level of commitment to their development as LOC and to USAFA. However, cadets' self-reported commitment revealed a wide range of commitment and with a significant subset of cadets with moderate to low commitment levels. This assessment undoubtedly is a best-case scenario given that participants were volunteers with no incentives during the COVID-19 pandemic. Another factor for consideration is USAFA's high level of attrition, averaging 16%, according to *U.S. News & World Report* (2021). Thus, this study fails to account for the perspectives of potential participants who left the institution with unfavorable experiences.

USAFA's vision is to produce the nation's best LOC. A common sentiment regarding USAFA's vision and mission was aptly stated by one senior (C1M1) during his interview, who said "Most cadets are pretty bought into that idea, that they want to become people and leaders of character because it's only going to help you. It's kind of a win-win." Research shows person-organization fit impacts organizational commitment (Chuang et al., 2011). Fit perception is a byproduct of congruence of individual and organizational values (Cable & Judge, 1996). Research shows a clear relationship between personal values and organizational commitment when employees perceive these values align with organizational values and mission (Finegan, 2000). This was proven true with person-fit being the strongest prediction antecedent in the

quantitative phase of this study. An overwhelming theme expressed by cadets in their interviews was belief in the value of the mission, developing as LOC. As two interviewees noted, being an LOC is “one of the goals that everyone has, everyone wants” (see Appendix G, Table G44, C4M4), because “we want to be people that the rest of the world can look up to” (see Appendix G, Table G44, C4F1).

Yet, cadets expressed great concern and even skepticism of USAFA’s congruence in seeking this goal, as well as effectiveness in selecting, developing, evaluating and incentivizing cadets to become leaders of character. Overall, the level of cadet commitment to their development as LOC, to USAFA as an organization, and inclination to serve the nation were very individualized based on a variety of factors at the individual, interpersonal, and organizational levels.

Gaining an understanding of how committed cadets are to the mission and USAFA is a foundational cornerstone for evaluating the effectiveness of the institution. With the considerable variability in commitment levels within the study, it is vital to understand the factors causing such an extreme range of cadet commitment. The final research question provides insight into how these antecedents are interrelated.

Research Question 3: How and Why Are Certain Factors Correlated With Commitment Levels at USAFA?

The third and final research question focused on understanding how and why certain factors were associated with commitment levels at USAFA. This is accomplished by integrating theory, findings from previous research, and comparing conclusions from both phases of this study. Collectively, they indicate a strong interrelationship between various commitment variables.

Cadet Commitment to Developing as a Leader of Character

Each cadet possesses individual distinctions before coming to USAFA including ability and preparation; goals, identities, motivations, personality and upbringing; and perspectives. Some of these are important considerations for selection (e.g., ability and preparation), and others for development (e.g., perspectives). These individual factors can influence commitment to developing as a LOC.

Developing as a LOC requires intentionality and time, which is challenging at a place like USAFA with many opportunities and competing priorities. Cadets' ability and preparation before coming to USAFA can improve efficiency of tasks and alleviate the impact of workload which hinders cadet commitment because the more capable and prepared a cadet is, the more available time they have. Workload is a significant obstacle in cadet commitment to their development, as one sophomore put it, "sometimes they place so much on people just across the board and some people can't handle it and it breaks them down a little bit" (see Appendix G, Table G18, C3F2). This is interrelated to cadet motivation and goals.

Individual motivation for coming and remaining at USAFA is strongly tied to goals and priorities. Goal commitment is a motivational construct that has evolved from expectancy theory, the concept that people act based on their motivations and these motivations are related to the expected results of their behavior (Hollenbeck & Klein, 1987). Although distinct, goal commitment and motivation are closely associated (Klein et al., 1999). As a freshman put it, "[Commitment] has a lot to do with . . . your motivation for being here. . . . Some people don't always come here for the right reasons. Some athletes come here just to play their sport" (see Appendix G, Table G7, C4F1). Goals, motivation, and priorities are based on identity.

As Stets and Burke (2000) expressed in defining identity theory, the core of identity is the creation of a role, incorporating oneself into the meanings and expectations that guide behavior (Burke, 1991; Burke & Reitzes, 1981; Burke & Tully, 1977; Thoits, 1986). Social identity theory is simply the knowledge that one belongs to a social group that has extended to subtheories focusing on social influence, group norms, and collective behavior (Hogg, 2016). With the mission in mind, the goal should be for all cadets to see their core identity as a “leader of character.”

Part of identity is socially constructed based on the influence of others. Cadets collectively shared the significance of social interaction and influence on their commitment. Quantitatively it was clear that USAFA subcultures such as squadron and sports teams influence commitment levels. This influence includes aspects of cadet culture including cynicism.

Cadets’ perceptions of organizational effectiveness also affected commitment. Empowerment was a triangulated organizational factor affecting commitment. Cadets who perceived they were empowered were more committed to their development. This is consistent with metanalysis of the organizational commitment literature identifying empowerment as strong antecedent to commitment (Fornes et al., 2008). Cadets expressed USAFA’s lack of empowerment as a hindrance to their commitment. When cadets believe USAFA has a long-term purpose and direction, they are more committed to their development. When cadets feel like they are included as part of the team, they are more committed. Conversely, quantitative data showed the stronger a cadet’s perception that USAFA has an ethical code guiding behavior and share a common perspective, the lower their commitment was to develop as leaders of character. These could have been Type 1 errors where the null hypothesis was incorrectly rejected; however, it is

more likely cadets see policies as standardized but disagree with them. A senior (C1M5) made a critical comment about the curriculum, saying:

The curriculum could change in a lot of ways to help drive the Academy or drive cadets in the direction of [being] actual leaders of character. We've gotten to the point where we just want to focus on the three aspects of being an academy (physical, athletics, and military), the three separate points that we just have to do well and to get the graduation. I don't think a lot of cadets are really focusing on that [the mission] aspect anymore. I think the reason why is because the curriculum doesn't really push the overall goal that USAFA claims to be pursuing.

Collectively, cadets' commitment to their development increases over time because they gain understanding of and belief in the mission of USAFA: becoming leaders of character.

Cadet Commitment to USAFA as an Organization

Cadet commitment to the Academy has significant overlap with factors affecting commitment to the stated mission, including age, goals, identity, motivation, personal makeup, and perspectives (at the individual level); social interaction, social influence, and squadron (at the interpersonal level); person-fit factors; COVID-19; cynicism; and perceptions of organizational effectiveness, subcultures, and workload (at the organizational level).

Although many commonalities exist between these commitment targets, some factors affected organizational commitment differently, either with greater frequency (e.g., motivation), greater influence (e.g., person-fit) or inversely (e.g., age). Thus, this study explained variation in organizational commitment by accounting for an average of 64% of the variation, while only explaining an average of 55% of the variation for commitment to the mission. Person-fit was the strongest predictor for both commitment targets; cadets whose values aligned with their

commander, squadron, and USAFA were more committed than cadets whose values were not in alignment. Although person-fit accounted for an average of almost one third of the variation for organizational commitment, it accounted for less than one quarter of the variation for commitment to the mission.

Certain individual factors affecting both commitment targets had different outcomes. Although age was a predictive value for both targets, it had inverse effects. Although cadet commitment to the mission increased over time, it decreased over time to the institution. The decrease in cadet commitment to USAFA over time has a higher level of confidence with multiple age and class year variables showing predictive value. This is further validated because graduates of USAFA's preparatory school and prior enlistment cadets were also associated with lower levels of commitment to USAFA. Most prior enlisted cadets went to USAFA's preparatory school which is essentially an additional year at USAFA. As one freshman noted, "I have seen a few [preppies] that maybe their commitment has gone down because they have four more years. They're starting over" (see Appendix G, Table G28, C4F2). Additionally, prior enlisted cadets have been in the operational Air Force, understand how it works, and are more critical of USAFA. As another freshman stated, "Prior preppies are a little different because they know how the Air Force works. . . . I think they can get pretty cynical and they kind of distance themselves from the Academy as a whole" (see Appendix G, Table G28, C3M3). They are "a little bit less committed . . . [they] have this outside perspective so they can see [things] a little bit easier or some of the things we do here that don't make a lot of sense" (see Appendix G, Table G29, C2M4). Whether measuring age, time of prior service, or time at USAFA, the overwhelming theme is cadet commitment to the institution decreases over time.

Two other mutual variables between commitment targets are motivation and identity. When motivation is in alignment with USAFA's mission (e.g., sense of service), cadets are more committed, and when cadet's motivation is more self-centered (e.g., free education), cadets are less committed. Identity results are mixed and require further research to better understand how it affects cadet commitment. Cadet perception of alignment between espoused values and actual behavior of USAFA as an institution affects commitment. This idea is reinforced by how perspective affects commitment.

Perspective transformation is simply the process by which a new experience is assimilated to or informed by past experiences (Mezirow, 1978). Five thematic perspectives were linked to increased commitment to USAFA, three of which were also relevant for commitment to USAFA's mission: seeing opportunities, seeing the big picture, and focusing on the collective team. The other two perspectives are more connected to the organization. When cadets perceive a gap in expectations of USAFA or an external locus of control, they are less committed to the institution. Gender is the other individual factor associated with commitment to USAFA.

Due to the mean difference between male and female commitment to USAFA in the quantitative portion of the study, a gender prompt was asked during the second phase of the study. The results were clear; over two thirds of comments from both males and females thought female cadets were more committed than male cadets with the rest seeing no gender difference. While research has shown different predictors of organizational commitment based on gender (Major et al., 2013), these findings contradict existing research which has shown men to be more committed to their jobs (Peng et al., 2009) and their organizations (Marsden et al., 1993) than women. However, as Sloan (2017) validated, coworker support is an important antecedent of organization commitment, and women tend to perceive more supportive relationships with

coworkers than men (McGuire, 2012). While other reasons were speculated as contributing to higher female commitment at USAFA (e.g., the need to prove themselves and gain respect), higher perception of supporting relationships is supported by the cadet interpersonal relationship comments. Nine of the ten comments made on how social influence affected cadet commitment were made by women. Additionally, equity and fairness (Fornes et al., 2008) and involvement/participation (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990) are well-established antecedents to commitment. Social exchanges were shown to affect both commitment targets.

Organizational factors were more frequently and strongly connected as antecedents to cadet commitment to USAFA than to the mission. Research on organizational commitment has shown many organizational factors as antecedents to commitment including congruency (Fornes et al., 2008), empowerment (Fornes et al., 2008), equity and fairness (Meyer et al., 2002), interesting and purposeful work (Fornes et al., 2008), involvement/participation (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990), organizational support (Meyer et al., 2002), recognition/reward allocation (Cohen & Gattiker, 1994; Fornes et al., 2008), satisfaction (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990) and social integration (Nägele & Neuenschwander, 2014). The strict hierarchal structure at USAFA reduces commitment because as one senior (C1M5) stated, “[USAFA needs to give] cadets a little bit more responsibility, because what I've realized is when you treat people like their kids, they tend to act like kids. When you treat people like adults, they act like adults” (see Appendix G, Table G37). Tight control and lack of autonomy in decision making affects cadet commitment to USAFA. This aligns with increased cadet commitment when cadets perceived they had the ability to make an impact or consensus required discussion. Cadets want agency and ownership in the process, and as one freshman (C4M2) said, “People aren’t as committed as they could be

because they have no ownership at this place” (see Appendix G, Table G37). Without freedom of opportunity (or choice), it is hard to build trust.

As Akar (2018) presented in his meta-analysis of organizational trust, higher levels of trust result in increased job satisfaction, organizational citizenship behaviors, and organizational commitment. Organizational trust is built on credibility, congruence, and consistency. Many cadets lose trust in USAFA’s focus on the mission over time as, one senior (C1M5) said:

[The mission] is a lot of buzz words. If the Academy actually cares about character, I think it’s going to be a lot of changes in the things we do as cadets or some of the processes that [we] would go through as cadets, that I don't think necessarily contribute to us meeting that goal.

Another senior (C1M1) shared their concern over how poorly USAFA executes the mission and said, “We kind of [have] an inconsistency in how we don't really develop leaders or how it's poorly done” (see Appendix G, Table G38). Many cadets voiced skepticism and a lack of trust in certain core elements of USAFA’s organizational execution including: the changes in the training process, certain aspects of the curriculum, and the selection and evaluation process. As one junior (C2M4) put it, “I really like the mission statement. . . . Our recruiting process is a little bit skewed away from that. We focus on some other externals that don't necessarily prove indicative of recruiting the right folks” (see Appendix G, Table G41). This aligned with the quantitative findings that the more cadets believe USAFA has a clear strategy for the future with realistic and achievable goals, the more committed they are to the institution. Another junior (C2M5) emphasized a perceived disconnect between the mission and assessments stating, “The things that we're doing that measure success are sought for their own end and we need to understand that they have to be inextricably intertwined with the mission statement, which is

being a better person” (see Appendix G, Table G41). All actions and policy decisions by leadership at the organizational level communicate a message.

Communication was the most consistent and thoroughly discussed organizational factor cadets shared as decreasing their commitment to USAFA as an organization. Communication, specifically vertical communication from organizational leadership, has proven to be a predictive factor of organizational commitment (Allen, 1992; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Postmes et al., 2001; Wit, 2001). Recent research has shown effective communication can enhance both trust and commitment (Zeffane et al., 2011). Cadets believe the communication of leadership at USAFA is incongruent, lacks transparency, and lacks an explanation of “why” things are being done. Ineffective communication decreases trust in and commitment to the organization. As one sophomore said, “Communication has been a big part of it [reduced commitment]. Feeling like I’m . . . intentionally kept in the dark sometimes” (see Appendix G, Table G36). Communication is a key lever that can enhance members’ feelings of inclusion, trust, ownership, and commitment to the organization. This study identified many organizational factors hindering cadet commitment to USAFA and its mission. In summary, many individual, relational and organizational factors influence cadet commitment at USAFA.

Implications for Further Research

Although this study provided a snapshot of commitment at USAFA, a longitudinal study would provide a much more comprehensive understanding of cadet commitment levels, how commitment evolves over time, and which antecedents matter most at different points in cadet careers. Further iterations of a survey, with more participants, could further explore subcultures including clubs, sports teams, and the squadron, as well as new independent variables (IVs) to predict cadet commitment more comprehensively. For example, ability and preparation were

identified as factors influencing cadet commitment and thus, would be worth exploring if grade point average provides predictive value. Other factors identified in the qualitative phase of this study that could be measured as independent variables in future studies were communication and perspectives. Each phase of this study provided emergent findings that could be triangulated, and understanding could be improved through follow on studies. The quantitative portion of the study revealed identity as a significant predictor of commitment. However, there is ambiguity with how and why it relates to cadet commitment that needs further exploration.

Further validation is needed to better understand the consistency and strength of prediction for certain statements identifying cadet perception of organizational effectiveness. In addition, some of these characteristics seem inconsistent or illogical. Two examples are the belief that USAFA's goals are aligned across mission elements, and that work is executed through horizontal control and coordination, both of which were associated with lower commitment levels. Either these were spurious findings or more effort needs to be expended to increase understanding of how and why they were associated with commitment.

Finally, using USAFA as a commitment target might be less beneficial than another target, such as commitment to serving as an officer in the operational Air Force. The qualitative portion of this study exposed the limitations and concerns with using the organization as a commitment target.

Implications for USAFA

Although cadets expressed frustration and disappointment with organizational execution of the mission, all cadets who discussed the mission itself believed in the concept of developing as leaders of character at least to some degree. However, many barriers exist preventing the mission from becoming cadets' top priority. First, the task workload is overwhelming for many

cadets, especially early on. The shortage of available time is magnified for some with lower aptitude and less preparation before coming into USAFA. As Kerr (1975) discussed, rewarding for one thing while hoping for another is the fundamental flaw of social nature. Critically reexamining USAFA's selection and evaluation process is the most noteworthy suggestion for application from this study.

Cadets possess a wide range of goals, motivation, and priorities. This study demonstrated motivation for coming to USAFA is an important antecedent to commitment. Furthermore, motivation drives goals and priorities and is intertwined with identity. Ensuring scrutiny in selecting potential cadets based on their motivation is vital to achieve the desired outcomes for individual cadets upon graduating from USAFA as well as creating an environment and culture driving toward that end-state. The closer the person-fit alignment of vision and values is prioritized for admittance, the more effective the training and development process will be. This also applies to evaluation.

When evaluating cadets for retention and stratification, the foundational questions should be centered: Are they a leader of character? Do they have the desire and potential to be a strong leader with sound moral character? If the answer is no, they may not be a good fit for USAFA. Additionally, while it is important for leadership to educate, inspire, and train cadets, the organization must foster alignment of cadet priorities to desired outcomes by assessing and incentivizing those outcomes. If the mission is its overarching desired outcome, USAFA's guidepost for success in cadet development (i.e., overall performance average or OPA) should evolve from measuring only grades, military performance, and physical fitness to incorporate character-based leadership aptitude. As one junior (C2M5) articulated, "The things that we're doing that measure success are sought for their own end and we need to understand that they

have to be inextricably intertwined with the mission statement, which is being a better person” (see Appendix G, Table G41). Restructuring the evaluation process is vital, as is critically analyzing current USAFA programs with the intent of reducing quantity to improve their quality.

Although USAFA may benefit from a reduction in programs, one worthwhile investment would be to provide incoming cadets with training in perspective taking. With perspective and associated mindsets providing a critical element for enhancing cadet commitment, this is a fundamental skill worth developing.

This study reinforces leadership matters at all levels. The senior leaders at USAFA from the superintendent down to the Air Officer Commanding (AOC) set the example and model for what “right” looks like. One junior (C2F1) appropriately stated the impact of a good leader versus a bad leader on her commitment to USAFA saying:

Leadership, individual leaders make me want to be a better person, but those leaders are usually the people that hold themselves accountable, saying 'you're going to be here for Thanksgiving, I'm going to be here for Thanksgiving, I'm in the same boat as you.' versus the leaders that act like an authoritarian and get up and lay out these blanket rules, but I don't really think that they hold themselves to the same standards.

This statement also applies to other skills identified as fostering commitment including communication and perspective taking. Leaders model effective communication by being transparent, willing to receive feedback, explaining the “why” when giving direction, and using inclusive language that enhances trust, teamwork, and commitment. Effective leaders have attitudes, mindsets, and perspectives that enable an internal locus of control and ownership of outcomes. Peer leadership affects culture by either inspiring others to growth and develop or by increasing cynicism and apathy. As one senior (C1F4) said, “Some factors that contribute to that

[commitment] are definitely the people you surround yourself with” (see Appendix G, Table G11). Critical selection and evaluation are not only important for cadets, but even more so for the permanent leadership at USAFA: Academy Military Trainers (AMTs), AOCs, coaches, instructors, and staff. The mission is not only for these leaders to develop leaders of character, but to simultaneously develop as leaders of character.

Limitations

The quantitative phase of this study was cross-sectional and included less than 5% of the cadet population due to the circumstances surrounding COVID-19. The qualitative phase of this study exposed limitations in measuring commitment cross-sectionally, as commitment levels tend to fluctuate over time by situation and circumstance. Without a longitudinal methodology, findings cannot be used to establish the direction of the relationship between variables. Additionally, cross-sectional quantitative study that run extensive significance tests (i.e., *t* tests) are prone to Type 1 errors.

This study was dependent on self-reported data in both phases and was susceptible to social desirability bias and researcher bias. Another consideration is self-reported commitment may contain sociability bias. Subjective evaluation of one’s commitment through observation requires a considerable amount of inference. Thus, effective interpretation of commitment level requires significant interaction over time. The findings from this study are not generalizable due to the specific context of the target population. Commitment should be measured longitudinally for a more accurate and thorough understanding. However, collectively the two phases of this study are helpful in gaining a basic understanding of cadet commitment at USAFA.

Significance

Despite these limitations, this study advances the research on commitment in many ways. Chapter 2 of this dissertation discussed some of the gaps in the literature on commitment. One main gap is the dearth of qualitative research on commitment. Additionally, very little of the methodology within the existing commitment literature is longitudinal in nature. Thus, understanding the nature of the relationship between commitment and other variables is based on theory. This study helped to better understand how and why certain factors are associated with commitment.

At a more fundamental level, this study helps to mitigate the largest critique of commitment literature, which is definition and construct discrepancies (Mowday et al., 1979). Many definition constructs confound commitment with other distinct constructs (Klein et al., 2012; 2014), resulting in conceptual stretching and difficulty interpreting results (Darolia et al., 2010; Klein et al., 2012). This study used the KUT commitment construct which uses a more precise definition of commitment. Since this construct has only been used since 2012, this dissertation further validates this measurement tool while testing a new commitment target, the mission statement. Finally, this study furthered the body of commitment research by providing an extensive data set to validate current theories and commitment antecedents, as well as identifying new commitment antecedents (e.g., perspectives).

Conclusion

This endeavor was pursued to better understand how effective USAFA is at executing its noble and necessary mission. The U.S. Air Force and nation needs virtuous leaders willing and able to make a positive impact on society. This study identified the strength and range of cadet commitment at USAFA and better understand factors that influence commitment. The result is

an increased body of knowledge useful in making more informed and effective decisions on selection, assessment, and retention of both cadets and permanent party at USAFA. The results also allow USAFA to critically review curriculum, training, and processes to enhance organizational effectiveness in executing the mission to develop officers of character ready to serve in defense of the nation.

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APPENDIX A

USAF Academy Organizational Effectiveness Survey

Instructions: This survey is intended to provide insight into how USAFA's permanent party leadership, processes and policies effect cadets' commitment to their character development. This survey is confidential and will not be used in any way to look at individual cadets' values or actions. This survey will take approximately 15 minutes, but in mindfully answering these questions you are enabling USAFA to improve its organizational effectiveness. Thus, it is vital for you to be completely honest about how you actually feel, not providing "desired" responses.

Q1 Rank each of these identities from the most important identity to you at the top and the least important identity to you at the bottom:

- _____ Intercollegiate (IC) or athlete (1)
- _____ Student (2)
- _____ Airman/Cadet/Member of Profession of Arms (3)
- _____ Leader of Character (4)

Q2 What is the **primary reason** you came to USAFA?

- Debt-free education (1)
- Family Pressure/Family legacy/Family recommendation (2)
- Prestige (3)
- Sense of service (4)
- Desire to fly (5)
- Intercollegiate athletics (6)
- Location (7)
- Other, please specify (8) _____

Q3 What is the **primary reason** you have stayed at USAFA?

- Debt-free education (1)
- Guaranteed job (2)
- Family pressure/Family legacy (3)
- Good setup for your future (4)
- Committed to being an officer/serving (5)
- Desire to fly (6)
- Community/Teammates/Friendship (Sq, Team, Club, etc) (7)
- "Stuck" post-commitment (8)
- Other, please specify (9) _____

Q4 Commitment is defined as a desired psychological bond reflecting dedication to and responsibility for a particular target. How **committed** are you to your character development?

- Not at all (1)
- Slightly (2)
- Moderately (3)
- Quite a bit (4)
- Extremely (5)

Q5 To what extent do you **care about** character development?

- Not at all (1)
- Slightly (2)
- Moderately (3)

- Quite a bit (4)
- Extremely (5)

Q6 How **dedicated** are you to your character development?

- Not at all (1)
- Slightly (2)
- Moderately (3)
- Quite a bit (4)
- Extremely (5)

Q7 To what extent have you **chosen** to be committed to your character development?

- Not at all (1)
- Slightly (2)
- Moderately (3)
- Quite a bit (4)
- Extremely (5)

Q8-35 **USAFA as an Organization:** This set of statements describe different aspects of an organization's culture. To answer the items, think of your perception of USAFA as a whole and the way things are usually done. Use the scale to indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the statements.

	Strongly disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
Decisions are usually made at the level where the best information is. (1)					
Information is widely shared so that everyone can get the information they need when it is needed. (2)					
Everyone believes they can have a positive impact. (3)					
Being at USAFA is like being part of a team. (4)					
USAFA relies on horizontal control and coordination to get work done, rather than a hierarchy. (5)					
Squadrons are the primary building blocks of USAFA. (6)					
USAFA is constantly improving compared to other military academies/universities. (7)					
USAFA continually invests in the skills of its cadets. (8)					
The capability of cadets are viewed as an important source of competitive advantage at USAFA. (9)					

The leadership (permanent party and cadet) as a whole follows the guidelines they set for the rest of the organization. (10)

There is a clear set of values in this organization that governs the way we do business. (11)

The set of values in this organization that governs the way we do business are consistent. (12)

USAFA has an ethical code that guides our behavior by telling us right from wrong. (13)

When disagreements occur, we work hard to achieve solutions that best fit all parties involved. (14)

It is easy to reach consensus, even on difficult issues. (15)

We often have trouble reaching agreement on key issues. (16)

People from different organizational units still share a common perspective. (17)

It is easy to coordinate projects/events across multiple mission elements at USAFA. (18)

There is good alignment of goals across mission elements. (19)

USAFA has long-term purpose. (20)

USAFA has a clear mission that gives meaning to our work. (21)

USAFA has a clear strategy for the future. (22)

There is widespread agreement across mission elements about the goals of USAFA. (23)

Leaders of this organization set goals that are ambitious, but realistic. (24)

The leadership has clearly stated objectives. (25)

We have a shared vision of what this organization will be like in the future. (26)

Leaders of this organization have a long-term orientation. (27)

Our vision creates motivation for our cadets. (28)

Q36 Commitment is defined as a desired psychological bond reflecting dedication to and responsibility for a particular target. ^[1]_{SEP} How **committed** are you to USAFA as an organization?

- Not at all (1)
- Slightly (2)
- Moderately (3)
- Quite a bit (4)
- Extremely (5)

Q37 To what extent do you **care about** USAFA as an organization?

- Not at all (1)
- Slightly (2)
- Moderately (3)
- Quite a bit (4)
- Extremely (5)

Q38 How **dedicated** are you to USAFA as an organization?

- Not at all (1)
- Slightly (2)
- Moderately (3)
- Quite a bit (4)
- Extremely (5)

Q39 To what extent have you **chosen** to commit to USAFA as an organization?

- Not at all (1)
- Slightly (2)
- Moderately (3)
- Quite a bit (4)
- Extremely (5)

Q40 To what extent do your values match or fit with USAFA as an organization?

- Not at all (1)
- Slightly (2)
- Moderately (3)
- Mostly (4)
- Completely (5)

Q41 To what extent do your values fit with the members of USAFA?

- Not at all (1)
- Slightly (2)
- Moderately (3)
- Mostly (4)
- Completely (5)

Q42 The values of USAFA as an organization reflect my own values and beliefs.

- Not at all (1)
- Slightly (2)
- Moderately (3)
- Mostly (4)
- Completely (5)

Q43 To what extent are the things you value similar to the things your squadron values?

- Not at all (1)
- Slightly (2)
- Moderately (3)
- Mostly (4)
- Completely (5)

Q44 My personal values match the values of the members in my squadron.

- Not at all (1)
- Slightly (2)
- Moderately (3)
- Mostly (4)
- Completely (5)

Q45 My squadron's values and culture provide a good fit with the things I value in life.

- Not at all (1)
- Slightly (2)
- Moderately (3)
- Mostly (4)
- Completely (5)

Q46 To what extent do your values align with your AOC's values?

- Not at all (1)
- Slightly (2)
- Moderately (3)
- Mostly (4)
- Completely (5)

Q47 To what extent do you trust your AOC?

- Not at all (1)
- Slightly (2)
- Moderately (3)
- Mostly (4)
- Completely (5)

Q48 To what extent do you value your AOC's leadership?

- Not at all (1)
- Slightly (2)
- Moderately (3)
- Mostly (4)
- Completely (5)

Q49 Gender

- Male (1)
- Female (2)
- Prefer not to answer (3)

Q50 Class Year

- 4-Degree (1)
- 3-Degree (2)
- 2-Degree (3)
- Firstie (4)

Q51 Age

▼ 18 (1) ... 27 (10)

Q52 What Squadron are you in?

▼ 01 (1) ... 40 (40)

Q53 Race/Ethnicity

- Hispanic (1)
- Non-Hispanic (2)

Q54 Race/Ethnicity

- African American (1)
- Asian American (2)
- Pacific Islander (3)
- Native American (4)
- Caucasian (5)
- Other, please describe (6) _____

Q55 Are you and Intercollegiate Athlete (IC) at USAFA?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q56 Which sport do are you associated with?

- Baseball (1)
- Basketball (2)
- Boxing (3)
- Cross Country (4)
- Fencing (5)
- Football (6)
- Golf (7)
- Gymnastics (8)
- Ice Hockey (9)
- Lacrosse (10)
- Rifle (11)
- Soccer (12)
- Spirit (13)
- Swimming & Diving (14)
- Tennis (15)
- Track & Field (16)
- Volleyball (17)
- Water Polo (18)
- Wrestling (19)
- Other (20) _____

Q57 Do you have prior military service before USAFA (including Junior ROTC)?

- Yes (1)

- No (2)

Q58 What type of prior service do you have? Check all that apply

- USAFA Prep School (1)
- Other military prep school (2)
- Prior enlisted (3)
- Junior ROTC (4)
- Other, please specify (5) _____

APPENDIX B

Semistructured Interview Questionnaire

ADMIN OVERSIGHT:

1. WHO IS CONDUCTING THIS RESEARCH? My name is Justin Pendry, 2002 USAFA graduate former AOC, current PhD student and returning to CCLD-member.
2. WHY ARE YOU BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH? You are invited to participate in this research project because you are a cadet at the U.S. Air Force Academy who has knowledge on this topic. As a cadet, you have expert knowledge about USAFA and yourself.
3. WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY? This study examines cadet commitment to their development as a Leader of Character as well as to USAFA as an organization. We also are studying associated indicators of commitment (or lack thereof) to assess the effectiveness of character development at USAFA. This includes understanding the key factors that influence cadet commitment levels.
4. WHAT WILL YOU BE ASKED TO DO? Utilize approximately 30–45 minutes of your time to answer questions openly and honestly to help me better assess how effective USAFA is currently working in its stated mission. If you volunteer to take part in this study, you will be one of about 50 people from the U.S. Air Force Academy to do so.
6. WILL YOU BENEFIT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY? You will not receive any personal benefit from participating in this study. The data collected may help researchers answer questions about factors that foster or hinder cadet commitment and enhance USAFA's organizational effectiveness.
7. DO YOU HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY? Your answers are confidential (non-attributional and non-retribution). If you decide to take part in the study, it should be because you really want to volunteer. You will not lose any benefits or rights you would normally have if you choose not to volunteer. You can stop at any time during this interview. Your choice to participate will not affect your military or Air Force Academy career.

Do you have any questions? Do you voluntarily consent to conducting this interview at this time?

Interview Questions:

1. Tell me about what brought you to USAFA.
Potential probes:
 - What was your motivation in choosing USAFA?
2. Tell me about your experience at USAFA.
Potential probes:
 - How have you changed since coming to USAFA (Your interests, focus, priorities, values)?
 - Why have you stayed at USAFA?
3. What do you think about USAFA's mission focus of developing Leaders of Character (LOC)?
Potential probes:
 - How do you personally define being a LOC?
 - How well does USAFA foster/hinder the mission of developing LOC?

- How has your commitment to developing as a Leader of Character evolved since coming to USAFA?
 - What factors have affected your commitment to developing as a Leader of Character?
4. From your perspective, how committed are other cadets to their development as LOC?
Potential probes:
 - What factors foster/hinder cadet commitment to the mission of developing LOCs?
 - What groups do you as more or less committed to their development t as LOC?
 5. How has your commitment to USAFA as an organization evolved since coming to the Academy?
Potential probes:
 - What factors have affected your commitment to USAFA (SQ, AOC, DF, AD, etc)?
 6. Form your perspective, how committed are other cadets to USAFA?
Potential probes:
 - What factors have fostered/hindered cadet commitment to USAFA as an organization?
 - What groups do you as more or less committed to USAFA?
 - How do you think gender affects commitment to USAFA?
 - How do you think going to USAFA prep school affects commitment to USAFA?
 - How do you think being prior enlisted affects commitment to USAFA?
 7. How well is USAFA doing with diversity and inclusion? What evidence could you cite to support your answer?
Potential probes:
 - How fair/equitable is USAFA as an organization?
 - What are in-groups/out-groups at USAFA?
 8. Did you go to USAFA prep school or are you Prior Enlisted? If so answer question #9.

Focus/Intent: See how your USAFA Prep School/prior enlisted experience have affected your commitment to USAFA as an institution and to your development as a LOC.

Potential questions:

9. My research suggests cadets who attended USAFA Prep school are less committed to USAFA as an organization? Would you agree or disagree with this assertion? What evidence could you cite to support your answer?
 - How do you think the commitment to USAFA as an organization evolves over time for cadets who attended USAFA Prep School?
 - My research also suggests prior-enlisted cadets are less committed to USAFA as an organization? Would you agree or disagree with this assertion? What evidence could you cite to support your answer?
 - How do you think the commitment to USAFA as an organization evolves over time for prior-enlisted cadets?
 - USAFA emphasizes the importance of being an LOC. How do you think prior-enlisted/USAFA Prep school cadets responded to this mission focus on being an LOC? Why did you respond as you did?

Demographic questions

- | | |
|---------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <u>1)</u> Gender | <u>4)</u> SQ |
| <u>2)</u> Race/Ethnicity | <u>5)</u> IC/Sport/Club |
| <u>3)</u> Class Year | <u>6)</u> Prep School/Prior |

APPENDIX C

Factors Correlated With Cadet Commitment to Development as LOC

Correlations	Commitment to Development as LOC	Significance (2-tailed)
Commitment to LOC	Perfect (1)	N/A
LOC Commitment Q1 (Commitment)	High (.898)	0.000
LOC Commitment Q2 (Care)	High (.874)	0.000
LOC Commitment Q3 (Dedicated)	High (.904)	0.000
LOC Commitment Q4 (Chosen)	High (.874)	0.000
Commitment to USAFA	Moderate (.374)	0.000
USAFA Commitment Q1 (Commitment)	High (.356)	0.000
USAFA Commitment Q2 (Care)	High (.301)	0.000
USAFA Commitment Q3 (Dedicated)	High (.398)	0.000
USAFA Commitment Q4 (Chosen)	High (.272)	0.000
Importance of IC Identity	Low (-.135)	0.041
IC Top Identity	No significant correlation	
IC Bottom Identity	Low (.171)	0.005
Importance of Student Identity	Low (-.176)	0.007
Student Top Identity	Low (-.237)	0.000
Student Bottom Identity	No significant correlation	
Importance of Cadet Identity	No significant correlation	
Cadet Top Identity	No significant correlation	
Cadet Bottom Identity	No significant correlation	
Importance of LOC Identity	Low (.228)	0.001
LOC Top Identity	Low (.185)	0.005
LOC Bottom Identity	Low (-.149)	0.024
Reason for Coming (RFC) to USAFA		
RFC Debt Free Education	No significant correlation	
RFC Family	No significant correlation	
RFC Prestige	No significant correlation	
RFC Sense of Service	No significant correlation	
RFC Desire to Fly	No significant correlation	
RFC Location	Low (-.138)	0.036
RFC Division One Sports	No significant correlation	
Reason for Staying at USAFA		
RFS Debt Free Education	No significant correlation	
RFS Guaranteed Job	Low (-.230)	0.000
RFS Family Pressure	Low (-.159)	0.000
RFS Good Future Set Up	No significant correlation	
RFS Desire to Serve	Low (.218)	0.001
RFS Desire to Fly	No significant correlation	
RFS Community	No significant correlation	
RFS Stuck	No significant correlation	
RFS Others vs Self Focus	Low (.275)	0.000
Gender	No significant correlation	
Class Year	No significant correlation	
Firstie (Senior)	No significant correlation	

Correlations	Commitment to Development as LOC	Significance (2-tailed)
2-Degree (Junior)	No significant correlation	
3-Degree (Sophomore)	No significant correlation	
4-Degree (Freshman)	No significant correlation	
Age	No significant correlation	
18	No significant correlation	
19	No significant correlation	
20	No significant correlation	
21	No significant correlation	
22	No significant correlation	
23	Low (.145)	0.028
24 & Older	No significant correlation	
Squadron	No significant correlation	
Squadron 8	No significant correlation	
Rest of SQs	Low (.143)	0.03
Race/Ethnicity	No significant correlation	
Intercollegiate Athlete	No significant correlation	
Baseball vs Rest of ICs	No significant correlation	
Baseball vs All Cadets	No significant correlation	
Wrestling vs Rest of ICs	No significant correlation	
Wrestling vs All Cadets	No significant correlation	
Soccer vs Rest of ICs	No significant correlation	
Soccer vs All Cadets	No significant correlation	
USAFA Prep School	No significant correlation	
Prior Enlisted	No significant correlation	
Other Prior Military Service	No significant correlation	
Person-Fit Average	Moderate (.346)	0.000
Person-Supervisor Fit Average	Low (.262)	0.000
Person-Squadron Fit Average	Low (.247)	0.000
Person-USAFA Fit Average	Moderate (.346)	0.000
Org Effectiveness (OE) Avg.	Low (.146)	0.027
OE - Involvement (Empowerment Avg.)	Low (.168)	0.010
OE - Involvement (Team Orientation Avg.)	No significant correlation	
OE - Involvement (Capability Dev Avg.)	Low (.154)	0.019
OE - Involvement Average	Low (.158)	0.016
OE - Consistency (Core Values Avg.)	No significant correlation	
OE - Consistency (Agreement Avg.)	No significant correlation	
OE - Consistency (Coord & Integration Avg.)	No significant correlation	
OE - Consistency Average	No significant correlation	
OE - Mission (Strategic Direction & Intent Avg.)	No significant correlation	
OE - Mission (Goals & Objectives Avg.)	No significant correlation	
OE - Mission (Vision Avg.)	No significant correlation	
OE - Mission Average	No significant correlation	

APPENDIX D

Factors Correlated With Cadet Commitment to USAFA

Correlations	Commitment to USAFA	Significance (2-tailed)
Commitment to LOC	Moderate (.374)	0.000
LOC Commitment Q1 (Commitment)	Moderate (.338)	0.000
LOC Commitment Q2 (Care)	Moderate (.373)	0.000
LOC Commitment Q3 (Dedicated)	Moderate (.325)	0.000
LOC Commitment Q4 (Chosen)	Moderate (.295)	0.000
Commitment to USAFA	Perfect (1)	N/A
USAFA Commitment Q1 (Commitment)	Moderate (.894)	0.000
USAFA Commitment Q2 (Care)	Moderate (.878)	0.000
USAFA Commitment Q3 (Dedicated)	Moderate (.910)	0.000
USAFA Commitment Q4 (Chosen)	Moderate (.856)	0.000
Importance of IC Identity	Low (-.159)	0.016
IC Top Identity	No significant correlation	
IC Bottom Identity	Low (.184)	0.009
Importance of Student Identity	Low (-.183)	0.005
Student Top Identity	Low (-.242)	0.000
Student Bottom Identity	No significant correlation	
Importance of Cadet Identity	Low (.211)	0.001
Cadet Top Identity	Low (.166)	0.028
Cadet Bottom Identity	Low (-.145)	0.012
Importance of LOC Identity	No significant correlation	
LOC Top Identity	No significant correlation	
LOC Bottom Identity	No significant correlation	
Reason for Coming (RFC) to USAFA		
RFC Debt Free Education	Low (-.256)	0.000
RFC Family	No significant correlation	
RFC Prestige	No significant correlation	
RFC Sense of Service	Low (.238)	0
RFC Desire to Fly	No significant correlation	
RFC Location	No significant correlation	
RFC Division One Sports	Low (-.166)	0.012
Reason for Staying (RFS) at USAFA		
RFS Debt Free Education	Low (-.257)	0
RFS Guaranteed Job	Low (-.151)	0.022
RFS Family Pressure	No significant correlation	
RFS Good Future Set Up	No significant correlation	
RFS Desire to Serve	Low (.179)	0.007
RFS Desire to Fly	No significant correlation	
RFS Community	No significant correlation	
RFS Stuck	No significant correlation	
RFS Others vs Self Focus	Low (.207)	0.002
Gender	Low (-.132)	0.048

Correlations	Commitment to USAFA	Significance (2-tailed)
Class Year	Low (.248)	0.000
Firstie (Senior)	Low (-.200)	0.002
2-Degree (Junior)	No significant correlation	
3-Degree (Sophomore)	No significant correlation	
4-Degree (Freshman)	Low (.178)	0.007
Age	Low (-.288)	0.000
18	No significant correlation	
19	Low (.172)	0.009
20	No significant correlation	
21	No significant correlation	
22	Low (-.178)	0.007
23	Low (-.207)	0.002
24 & Older	No significant correlation	
Squadron		
Squadron 8	Low (-.143)	0.031
Rest of SQs	Low (.140)	0.034
Race/Ethnicity	No significant correlation	
Intercollegiate Athlete	No significant correlation	
Baseball vs Rest of ICs	Low (.236)	0.049
Baseball vs All Cadets	No significant correlation	
Wrestling vs Rest of ICs	No significant correlation	
Wrestling vs All Cadets	No significant correlation	
Soccer vs Rest of ICs	No significant correlation	
Soccer vs All Cadets	No significant correlation	
USAFA Prep School	Low (-.206)	0.002
Prior Enlisted	Low (-.162)	0.014
Other Prior Military Service	Low (.138)	0.036
Person-Fit Average	High (.576)	0.000
Person-Supervisor Fit Average	Moderate (.321)	0.000
Person-Squadron Fit Average	High (.503)	0.000
Person-USAFA Fit Average	High (.586)	0.000
Org Effectiveness (OE) Avg.	Moderate (.366)	0.000
OE - Involvement (Empowerment Avg.)	Low (.240)	0.000
OE - Involvement (Team Orientation Avg.)	Low (.246)	0.000
OE - Involvement (Capability Dev Avg.)	Moderate (.325)	0.000
OE - Involvement Average	Moderate (.359)	0.000
OE - Consistency (Core Values Avg.)	Low (.297)	0.000
OE - Consistency (Agreement Avg.)	Low (.257)	0.000
OE - Consistency (Coord & Integration Avg.)	Low (.235)	0.000
OE - Consistency Average	Moderate (.328)	0.000
OE - Mission (Strategic Direction & Intent Avg.)	Moderate (.363)	0.000
OE - Mission (Goals & Objectives Avg.)	Low (.203)	0.002
OE - Mission (Vision Avg.)	Low (.258)	0.000
OE - Mission Average	Moderate (.309)	0.000

APPENDIX E

Cadet Commitment to Developing as LOC Regression Models

LOC Commitment Model 1 - All Variables at Once	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	Beta		
Constant	0.763	0.562		1.356	0.18
Person-Fit Average	0.724	0.093	0.701	7.802	0
Org Effectiveness: Consistency - Core Values #4	-0.245	0.068	-0.316	-3.571	0.001
Org Effectiveness: Mission -Strategic Direction & Intent #1	0.369	0.116	0.277	3.188	0.002
Baseball IC	-0.483	0.157	-0.258	-3.082	0.003
Age 18	-0.526	0.18	-0.246	-2.917	0.005
Squadron 10	-0.546	0.22	-0.206	-2.488	0.015

LOC Commitment Model 2 - All Variables at Once w/o Seniors	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	Beta		
Constant	1.918	0.431		4.449	0
Person-Fit Average	0.533	0.109	0.513	4.87	0
Age 18	-0.597	0.203	-0.294	-2.946	0.005
Other Sports	0.366	0.133	0.266	2.742	0.008
Squadron 29	0.815	0.311	0.257	2.619	0.011
Motivation for Staying - Guaranteed Job	-0.679	0.294	-0.245	-2.31	0.025

LOC Commitment Model 3 - Variables A, B, then C	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	Beta		
Constant	2.531	0.354		7.153	0
IC Bottom Identity	0.216	0.124	0.157	1.735	0.088
Motivation for Staying - Guaranteed Job	-0.631	0.263	-0.215	-2.399	0.019
Person-Supervisor Fit Q1	0.204	0.078	0.263	2.615	0.011
Squadron 29	0.881	0.299	0.262	2.95	0.004
Person-Squadron Fit Q3	0.263	0.077	0.357	3.395	0.001
Other Sports	0.331	0.117	0.242	2.841	0.006
Org Effectiveness: Consistency - Coord & Integration #1	-0.132	0.064	-0.174	-2.072	0.042

LOC Commitment Model 4 - Variables A, C, then B	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	Beta		
Constant	2.215	0.309		7.168	0
IC Bottom Identity	0.205	0.128	0.149	1.599	0.115
Motivation for Staying - Guaranteed Job	-0.83	0.268	-0.282	-3.098	0.003
Org Effectiveness: Involvement - Team Orientation #1	0.043	0.059	0.074	0.736	0.464
Person-Supervisor Fit Q1	0.244	0.08	0.314	3.061	0.003
Squadron 29	0.838	0.309	0.249	2.711	0.009
Baseball IC	-0.415	0.166	-0.221	-2.505	0.015
Person-Squadron Fit Q3	0.194	0.087	0.264	2.234	0.029

LOC Commitment Model 5 - Variables B, A, then C	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	Beta		
Constant	2.219	0.42		5.288	0
Person-Fit Average	0.688	0.103	0.666	6.666	0
Baseball IC	-0.499	0.168	-0.266	-2.964	0.004
Age 18	-0.671	0.196	-0.313	-3.423	0.001
Motivation for Staying - Guaranteed Job	-0.484	0.276	-0.165	-1.749	0.085
Org Effectiveness: Consistency - Coord & Integration #1	-0.162	0.069	-0.213	-2.346	0.022

LOC Commitment Model 6 - Variables B, C, then A	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	Beta		
Constant	0.894	0.567		1.578	0.12
Person-Supervisor Fit Q1	0.25	0.075	0.322	3.355	0.001
Person-USAFA Fit Q3	0.401	0.076	0.509	5.261	0
Baseball IC	-0.439	0.154	-0.234	-2.849	0.006
Org Effectiveness: Consistency - Core Values #4	-0.285	0.077	-0.368	-3.689	0
Org Effectiveness: Involvement - Empowerment #3	0.166	0.052	0.283	3.184	0.002
Org Effectiveness: Mission -Strategic Direction & Intent #1	0.28	0.116	0.209	2.403	0.019
Age 21	0.331	0.143	0.204	2.321	0.024

LOC Commitment Model 7 - Variables C, A, then B	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	Beta		
Constant	1.32	0.647		2.04	0.046
Org Effectiveness: Involvement - Team Orientation #1	0.05	0.07	0.086	0.713	0.479
Org Effectiveness: Consistency - Core Values #4	-0.246	0.084	-0.318	-2.949	0.004
Org Effectiveness: Mission -Strategic Direction & Intent #1	0.339	0.125	0.254	2.715	0.009
Motivation for Staying - Guaranteed Job	-0.417	0.286	-0.142	-1.456	0.15
IC Bottom Identity	0.164	0.134	0.119	1.221	0.227
Person-Fit Average	0.523	0.133	0.506	3.927	0
Baseball IC	-0.365	0.173	-0.195	-2.104	0.039

LOC Commitment Model 8 - Variables C, B, then A	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	Beta		
Constant	0.9	0.572		1.573	0.121
Org Effectiveness: Involvement - Team Orientation #1	0.077	0.065	0.134	1.188	0.239
Org Effectiveness: Consistency - Core Values #4	-0.279	0.074	-0.36	-3.763	0
Org Effectiveness: Mission -Strategic Direction & Intent #1	0.363	0.116	0.272	3.134	0.003
Person-Fit Average	0.656	0.109	0.635	6.006	0
Baseball IC	-0.438	0.161	-0.234	-2.723	0.008
Squadron 10	-0.561	0.219	-0.212	-2.56	0.013
Age 18	-0.552	0.181	-0.257	-3.047	0.003

LOC Commitment Model 9 - All Variables at Once w/o Squadron	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	Beta		
Constant	0.877	0.583		1.504	0.137
Person-Fit Average	0.743	0.096	0.719	7.72	0
Org Effectiveness: Consistency - Core Values #4	-0.254	0.071	-0.328	-3.566	0.001
Org Effectiveness: Mission -Strategic Direction & Intent #1	0.328	0.119	0.246	2.75	0.008
Baseball IC	-0.44	0.162	-0.235	-2.717	0.008
Age 18	-0.491	0.187	-0.229	-2.625	0.011

LOC Commitment Model 10 - Variables A, B, then C w/o Squadron	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	Beta		
Constant	2.116	0.347		6.096	0
IC Bottom Identity	0.269	0.13	0.196	2.066	0.043
Motivation for Staying - Guaranteed Job	-0.575	0.272	-0.196	-2.113	0.039
Person-Supervisor Fit Q1	0.285	0.077	0.366	3.718	0
Baseball IC	-0.475	0.17	-0.253	-2.794	0.007
Person-USAFA Fit Q3	0.218	0.083	0.277	2.623	0.011

LOC Commitment Model 11 - Variables A, C, then B w/o Squadron	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	Beta		
Constant	2.084	0.354		5.882	0
IC Bottom Identity	0.263	0.131	0.192	2.009	0.049
Motivation for Staying - Guaranteed Job	-0.587	0.275	-0.2	-2.138	0.036
Org Effectiveness: Involvement - Team Orientation #1	0.032	0.058	0.055	0.542	0.59
Person-Supervisor Fit Q1	0.28	0.077	0.361	3.618	0.001
Baseball IC	-0.459	0.173	-0.245	-2.649	0.01
Person-USAFA Fit Q3	0.2	0.091	0.253	2.204	0.031

LOC Commitment Model 12 - Variables B, A, then C w/o Squadron	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	Beta		
Constant	2.219	0.42		5.288	0
Person-Fit Average	0.688	0.103	0.666	6.666	0
Baseball IC	-0.499	0.168	-0.266	-2.964	0.004
Age 18	-0.671	0.196	-0.313	-3.423	0.001
Motivation for Staying - Guaranteed Job	-0.484	0.276	-0.165	-1.749	0.085
Org Effectiveness: Consistency - Coord & Integration #1	-0.162	0.069	-0.213	-2.346	0.022

LOC Commitment Model 13 - Variables B, C, then A w/o Squadron	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	Beta		
Constant	0.877	0.583		1.504	0.137
Person-Fit Average	0.743	0.096	0.719	7.72	0
Baseball IC	-0.44	0.162	-0.235	-2.717	0.008
Org Effectiveness: Consistency - Core Values #4	-0.254	0.071	-0.328	-3.566	0.001
Org Effectiveness: Mission -Strategic Direction & Intent #1	0.328	0.119	0.246	2.75	0.008
Age 18	-0.491	0.187	-0.229	-2.625	0.011

LOC Commitment Model 14 - Variables C, A, then B w/o Squadron	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	Beta		
Constant	1.32	0.647		2.04	0.046
Org Effectiveness: Involvement - Team Orientation #1	0.05	0.07	0.086	0.713	0.479
Org Effectiveness: Consistency - Core Values #4	-0.246	0.084	-0.318	-2.949	0.004
Org Effectiveness: Mission -Strategic Direction & Intent #1	0.339	0.125	0.254	2.715	0.009
Motivation for Staying - Guaranteed Job	-0.417	0.286	-0.142	-1.456	0.15
IC Bottom Identity	0.164	0.134	0.119	1.221	0.227
Person-Fit Average	0.523	0.133	0.506	3.927	0
Baseball IC	-0.365	0.173	-0.195	-2.104	0.039

LOC Commitment Model 15 - Variables C, B, then A w/o Squadron	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	Beta		
Constant	1	0.596		1.679	0.098
Org Effectiveness: Involvement - Team Orientation #1	0.068	0.068	0.118	1.002	0.32
Org Effectiveness: Consistency - Core Values #4	-0.284	0.077	-0.366	-3.675	0
Org Effectiveness: Mission -Strategic Direction & Intent #1	0.321	0.119	0.24	2.686	0.009
Person-Fit Average	0.683	0.113	0.661	6.026	0
Baseball IC	-0.399	0.167	-0.213	-2.391	0.02
Age 18	-0.513	0.188	-0.239	-2.722	0.008

APPENDIX F

Cadet Commitment to USAFA Regression Models

USAFA Commitment Model 1 - All Variables at Once	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	Beta		
Constant	1.736	0.403		4.309	0
Person-Fit Average	0.521	0.106	0.478	4.903	0
Motivation for Coming - Intercollegiate Athletics	-0.619	0.123	-0.383	-5.03	0
IC Top Identity	0.638	0.179	0.282	3.576	0.001
OE: Involvement - Empowerment #3	0.175	0.049	0.284	3.586	0.001
Squadron 31	-0.951	0.364	-0.22	-2.61	0.011
Squadron 8	-0.607	0.283	-0.171	-2.148	0.036
Student Bottom Identity	-0.346	0.166	-0.153	-2.085	0.041

USAFA Commitment Model 2 - All Variables at Once w/o Seniors	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	Beta		
Constant	0.946	0.393		2.408	0.019
Person-Fit Average	0.751	0.095	0.687	7.874	0
Motivation for Coming - Intercollegiate Athletics	-0.513	0.134	-0.318	-3.815	0
Student Bottom Identity	-0.588	0.181	-0.259	-3.246	0.002
Squadron 32	0.547	0.243	0.187	2.246	0.029
IC Top Identity	0.524	0.196	0.244	2.676	0.01
Org Effectiveness: Involvement - Empowerment #3	0.132	0.055	0.207	2.389	0.02

USAFA Commitment Model 3 - Variables A, B, then C	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	Beta		
Constant	1.089	0.43		2.531	0.014
POA Bottom Identity	-0.228	0.163	-0.123	-1.404	0.165
Motivation for Coming - Prestige	0.464	0.202	0.194	2.302	0.025
Motivation for Coming - Sense of Service	0.192	0.135	0.127	1.421	0.16
Student Bottom Identity	-0.442	0.186	-0.195	-2.378	0.02
Person-Fit Average	0.636	0.098	0.584	6.482	0
Squadron 32	0.825	0.251	0.266	3.284	0.002
Org Effectiveness: Mission – Goals & Objectives #2	0.134	0.066	0.173	2.044	0.045

USAFA Commitment Model 4 - Variables A, C, then B	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	Beta		
Constant	1.228	0.381		3.223	0.002
POA Bottom Identity	-0.275	0.16	-0.149	-1.718	0.091
Motivation for Coming - Prestige	0.486	0.19	0.203	2.557	0.013
Motivation for Coming – Sense of Service	0.258	0.125	0.171	2.069	0.043
Student Bottom Identity	-0.326	0.179	-0.144	-1.825	0.073
Org Effectiveness: Mission -Strategic Direction & Intent #3	0.147	0.057	0.236	2.59	0.012
Org Effectiveness: Consistency - Agreement #3	0.194	0.064	0.262	3.049	0.003
Org Effectiveness: Consistency - Agreement #2	-0.168	0.062	-0.245	-2.691	0.009
Person-Fit Average	0.548	0.104	0.503	5.257	0
Squadron 32	0.739	0.242	0.239	3.048	0.003

USAFA Commitment Model 5 - Variables B, A, then C	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	Beta		
Constant	0.347	0.45		0.771	0.443
Person-Fit Average	0.718	0.088	0.66	8.144	0
Squadron 32	0.789	0.231	0.255	3.415	0.001
Motivation for Coming - Intercollegiate Athletics	-0.402	0.125	-0.249	-3.222	0.002
Importance of LOC Identity	0.13	0.046	0.217	2.8	0.007
Student Bottom Identity	-0.326	0.172	-0.144	-1.898	0.062
Org Effectiveness: Mission - Goals & Objectives #2	0.126	0.062	0.162	2.015	0.048
Org Effectiveness: Involvement - Empowerment #3	0.097	0.048	0.157	2.007	0.049

USAFA Commitment Model 6 - Variables B, C, then A	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	Beta		
Constant	-0.039	0.433		-0.091	0.928
Person-Fit Average	0.815	0.083	0.748	9.848	0
Squadron 32	0.734	0.227	0.237	3.229	0.002
Org Effectiveness: Mission - Goals & Objectives #2	0.158	0.059	0.203	2.679	0.009
Importance of LOC Identity	0.132	0.047	0.221	2.833	0.006
Motivation for Coming - Intercollegiate Athletics	-0.277	0.119	-0.171	-2.335	0.023
Age 19	0.348	0.122	0.219	2.843	0.006
Juniors	0.318	0.147	0.177	2.161	0.035
Asian American	-0.461	0.221	-0.149	-2.081	0.042

USAFA Commitment Model 7 - Variables C, A, then B	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	Beta		
Constant	1.405	0.458		3.065	0.003
Org Effectiveness: Average	0.172	0.127	0.149	1.36	0.179
Motivation for Staying – Guaranteed Job	-0.178	0.298	-0.057	-0.596	0.553
Motivation for Coming - Intercollegiate Athletics	-0.36	0.135	-0.223	-2.671	0.01
Age 22	-0.445	0.233	-0.159	-1.915	0.06
Motivation for Staying - Debt-Free Education	-0.394	0.322	-0.111	-1.225	0.225
Person-Fit Average	0.578	0.127	0.531	4.556	0
Squadron 32	0.737	0.277	0.238	2.66	0.01

USAFA Commitment Model 8 - Variables C, B, then A	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	Beta		
Constant	0.596	0.43		1.386	0.171
Org Effectiveness: Average	0.2	0.109	0.173	1.829	0.072
Person-Fit Average	0.734	0.097	0.675	7.582	0
Squadron 32	0.679	0.253	0.219	2.682	0.009
LOC Bottom Identity	0.268	0.131	0.163	2.04	0.046
Motivation for Coming - Intercollegiate Athletics	-0.411	0.125	-0.254	-3.292	0.002
IC Top Identity	0.409	0.19	0.181	2.149	0.036
Student Bottom Identity	-0.376	0.176	-0.167	-2.139	0.036

USAFA Commitment Model 9 - All Variables at Once w/o Squadron	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	Beta		
Constant	1.147	0.344		3.336	0.001
Person-Fit Average	0.746	0.089	0.685	8.41	0
Motivation for Coming - Intercollegiate Athletics	-0.542	0.123	-0.335	-4.41	0
IC Top Identity	0.615	0.179	0.272	3.434	0.001
Org Effectiveness: Involvement - Empowerment #3	0.181	0.052	0.292	3.498	0.001
Org Effectiveness: Consistency - Agreement #2	-0.128	0.056	-0.186	-2.284	0.026
Student Bottom Identity	-0.373	0.167	-0.165	-2.236	0.029

USAFA Commitment Model 10 - Variables A, B, then C w/o Squadron	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Beta</i>		
Constant	1.699	0.405		4.196	0
POA Bottom Identity	-0.199	0.175	-0.107	-1.132	0.262
Motivation for Coming - Prestige	0.44	0.218	0.183	2.018	0.048
Motivation for Coming - Sense of Service	0.237	0.143	0.157	1.663	0.101
Student Bottom Identity	-0.45	0.196	-0.199	-2.292	0.025
Person-Fit Average	0.623	0.105	0.573	5.961	0

2USAFA Commitment Model 11 - Variables A, C, then B w/o Squadron	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Beta</i>		
Constant	1.458	0.398		3.666	0.001
POA Bottom Identity	-0.269	0.171	-0.146	-1.577	0.12
Motivation for Coming - Prestige	0.452	0.202	0.189	2.235	0.029
Motivation for Coming - Sense of Service	0.231	0.133	0.153	1.741	0.087
Student Bottom Identity	-0.26	0.189	-0.115	-1.376	0.174
Org Effectiveness: Mission -Strategic Direction & Intent #3	0.124	0.06	0.199	2.07	0.043
Org Effectiveness: Consistency - Agreement #3	0.199	0.068	0.269	2.935	0.005
Org Effectiveness: Consistency - Agreement #2	-0.202	0.065	-0.294	-3.08	0.003
Person-Fit Average	0.544	0.111	0.499	4.891	0

USAFA Commitment Model 12 - Variables B, A, then C w/o Squadron	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Beta</i>		
Constant	1.376	0.351		3.917	0
Person-Fit Average	0.759	0.087	0.697	8.713	0
Motivation for Coming - Intercollegiate Athletics	-0.559	0.12	-0.345	-4.662	0
IC Top Identity	0.529	0.179	0.234	2.964	0.004
Student Bottom Identity	-0.414	0.164	-0.183	-2.527	0.014
Age 22	-0.366	0.219	-0.131	-1.669	0.1
Org Effectiveness: Involvement - Empowerment #3	0.186	0.055	0.301	3.372	0.001
Org Effectiveness: Consistency - Agreement #2	-0.114	0.055	-0.166	-2.074	0.042
Org Effectiveness: Involvement - Team Orientation #2	-0.115	0.057	-0.166	-2.028	0.047

USAFA Commitment Model 13 - Variables B, C, then A w/o Squadron	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	Beta		
Constant	1.4	0.361		3.872	0
Person-Fit Average	0.755	0.09	0.694	8.416	0
Motivation for Coming - Intercollegiate Athletics	-0.487	0.127	-0.301	-3.824	0
IC Top Identity	0.498	0.187	0.221	2.669	0.01
Student Bottom Identity	-0.49	0.175	-0.217	-2.808	0.007
Age 22	-0.476	0.218	-0.171	-2.186	0.033

USAFA Commitment Model 14 - Variables C, A, then B w/o Squadron	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	Beta		
Constant	1.732	0.462		3.747	0
Org Effectiveness Average	0.064	0.126	0.055	0.511	0.611
Motivation for Staying – Guaranteed Job	-0.151	0.312	-0.049	-0.483	0.631
Motivation for Coming - Intercollegiate Athletics	-0.388	0.141	-0.24	-2.76	0.008
Age 22	-0.509	0.242	-0.182	-2.103	0.04
Motivation for Staying - Debt-free Education	-0.192	0.327	-0.054	-0.586	0.56
Person-Fit Average	0.606	0.132	0.556	4.573	0

USAFA Commitment Model 15 - Variables C, B, then A w/o Squadron	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	Beta		
Constant	1.286	0.432		2.978	0.004
Org Effectiveness Average	0.053	0.108	0.045	0.485	0.629
Person-Fit Average	0.734	0.1	0.674	7.304	0
Motivation for Coming - Intercollegiate Athletics	-0.481	0.129	-0.297	-3.741	0
IC Top Identity	0.517	0.192	0.229	2.696	0.009
Student Bottom Identity	-0.478	0.178	-0.211	-2.687	0.009
Age 22	-0.461	0.221	-0.165	-2.081	0.041

APPENDIX G

Interview Quote Comment Tables

Table G1*Cadet Level of Commitment to Developing as LOC*

ID	Commitment Level to Developing as LOC (1-10 scale)
C2F1	I'm fully committed to being a LOC.
C4M3	I'm all in.
C2F3	Pretty high, probably a nine or ten.
C4F2	Producing someone [with] character that can lead others ... that is the main goal. And to me. ... I take that personally. I would want someone that's leading me to have integrity. ... [My commitment] is definitely high.
C4M2	My biggest goal from this place is to go out and be able to unselfishly lead people. So, I would say I'm probably eight or nine on that scale.
C3F4	I'm actually growing my character and becoming more committed as an officer or an officer candidate.
C2M5	I'm very committed.
C3M2	I'd have to say around the eight or nine range.
C4F4	Probably close to an eight or nine.
C4M1	I'm probably an eight.
C3M4	I'd say probably eight, maybe seven, as far as how committed I am, because I came here to be a leader.
C1M4	Probably seven or eight.
C2F4	I really care about my own development as a leader of character.
C3F2	In terms of my own development, I feel like I'm pretty committed to it.
C1F2	Around a seven.
C1F4	I would say seven, probably.
C4F3	I feel kind of in the middle, like a five or six.
C1F3	It's probably around a five right now. I honestly think I care more than other people.

Table G2*How Time at USAFA Affects Cadet Commitment to Developing as LOC*

ID	Evolution of Commitment to Developing as LOC Over Time
	Increases
C3M1	I wanted to develop or ... better myself in a way but didn't ... really know what path that would lead me [there]. I didn't realize that it would be character based. I thought it was going to be 'I want to become smarter' and 'I want to get these opportunities.' ... [I'm] more focused [now] on being the best officer I can be versus the best cadet I can be.

Starts Strong, Dips, Then Finishes Strong	
C3M4	That shock from basic, they're [freshman] a little bit more motivated ... I know that 4-degree year everybody was a little bit more motivated just because I was a little bit more stressed last year. ²⁷ I was definitely more motivated last year than this year to put time in to develop myself ... then it's 3-degrees; You get more freedom and so it [commitment] kind of goes down. I've seen the Firsties are a little bit more motivated ... just because they're now in charge of that squadron, it's theirs ... to shape. I've seen a lot of seniors take a lot of pride in developing the culture of the squad.
Decreases	
C4F1	It's a stressful environment. By the time you're a 2-degree and a Firstie ... you just want to be done. At least that's the common thing that I've heard at least around here and especially right now, and I feel like for some like they get that sense of 'senioritis,' and they're just at this point, they're just like whatever it takes really just to get me to graduation, I don't really care, and some of them ... won't do the thing ... that has the most integrity. ... It looks like everybody is just super burned out by the time they're done. ... I think it's just stress, tiredness, fatigue, all of that plays a role.

Table G3*Cadet Level of Commitment to USAFA*

ID	Level of Commitment to USAFA (1-10 scale)
C3M3	I'm very committed to the Academy. I love the Academy.
C3F2	On a scale of one to ten, I'd say probably a solid eight.
C3F4	My commitment has still been really high.
C4F4	I would definitely be about an eight.
C1F3	Stepping off the bus ... I just knew I was going to roll with the punches; whatever happened, happened, and it was going to be OK, but now I think I'm more committed to the institution and looking around and really wanting to see a positive change happen, even if that's after I'm gone.
C1F4	I'm still committed to the Academy and like what it was made to do.
C1M3	I put it at a five.

Table G4*How Time at USAFA Affects Cadet Commitment*

ID	Evolution of Commitment to USAFA Over Time
Increases	
C3F1	I definitely feel invested here. I'm kind of planting my seeds and I want to see how tall I can grow based on the soil of the Academy. I feel personally more of a reason to stay here because of those things. If it were not conducive to my values, I wouldn't be. The espoused values are things that I would uphold, and I feel a commitment to helping others stay on track and in improving the environment.

²⁷ USAFA uses different terms for cadets by class year: Freshman (4-degree), Sophomore (3-degree), Junior (2-degree) & Senior (Firstie).

ID	Evolution of Commitment to USAFA Over Time
C3F4	I definitely think once you come to the Academy and join the bigger team, the Academy team and the Air Force team, it's a lot easier to get committed and get on board. I think that growing together as a class, growing together as squadrons, helps us grow our commitment. It just grows over time. Firsties [are] obviously the most committed. Once you hit actual commitment and you commit yourself ... it marks for a lot of people probably a change from an external motivator to an internal motivator. ... I think it just grows as you spend more time here.
C4F1	I did the extra year, it was almost to the point, you're so far into this, there's really no turning around from here. ... This has been my goal since I was pretty young. ... I know it's going to be challenging, but we're going to do it. I got here and I was like, 'what have I done?' in the first days. ... I would say my commitment definitely wavered a little bit early on because I was just so taken back by everything that was going on ... but as the school years' gone on and I've continued to make different friendships ... my commitment has slowly started increasing again. ... Over time as you get more involved in the different opportunities this place gives you, you start to realize how special coming to and graduating from this place is going to be.
Starts Strong, Dips, Then Finishes Strong	
C1M3	'The Valley of Despair' it's when you enter any new job position and basically have blissful ignorance at first and then, an event happens where you mess up, maybe break something ... and [you realize] you have no idea what you're doing. Your confidence just plummets, and you stay at the bottom for a while. And then finally, you start to pick up on things and you learn better and then your confidence builds back up, but it never reaches the maximum again because, you always had that experience where you messed up. You come in here blissfully ignorant and you love the institution. You may hate being here, but you don't know too much about it. Then 3-degree year comes, and you're exposed to all these new things that ... you never really noticed ... Then Firstie year comes along and you've pretty much accepted everything. You know you can't really change too much ... [it] kind of smears your soul, but you survive. And then your committed in the end. It all comes to fruition, you get to graduate, you finally accomplish what you came here to do.
C3F2	A lot of Firsties really put off this [signal] I'm super committed, even if in the year previous they were like, 'I hate this place.'
Decreases	
C1F2	The Academy before you're here ... you look at it, it's [an] amazing place. Like, wow, they do so much and it's intense. That's how I felt coming into basic and even probably most of my freshman year, but you start to see that a lot of stuff here that doesn't really matter, and in that way, sometimes I find myself not putting a lot of effort into the little things I can slide by in. That's a lack of commitment. That actually increases [over time] you can get away with stuff and it doesn't matter. Let me focus my time on something else; commit myself to this aspect a lot more, put more effort into something else.
C1F3	It has decreased over the years.
C1F4	I think everyone's still committed, but it definitely dwindles the further you go just because you keep seeing the same things over and over.

ID	Evolution of Commitment to USAFA Over Time
C1M1	Personally, it's shrunk. When I came here, I was like, the Academy is this great place. You got a lot of excellent people and there definitely are those people here. But then you go through the years here and ... just stuff you dislike or disagree with happens. Now, where I am today is, I want to help individual people; I want to spend more time around friends; I want to spend more time with the honor probates, who I'm in charge of; I want to help them develop because they're going to be here for a couple more years. I'm more engaged in graduating and being the officer that the Air Force says they need me to be while also trying to help and develop people that want the help and development. Long story short, I'm more committed to the mission of the Academy now than I am really to the institution, because I think the institution has a lot of bureaucracy that stifles a lot of great things that could happen here.
C1M3	I put it [my commitment] at five [on a 1-10 scale]. Coming [in I was] for sure a 10, fully committed to the Academy.
C1M4	I would say freshman and sophomore year, I [was] committed to myself and to the Academy about the same, but these last two years with all the changes and probably COVID plays a factor in this too, but I would say I am less committed [to USAFA].
C2F3	I think all cadets are pretty committed. ... That's why we came here. Freshmen are more committed to the mission. ... But as we go through the Academy, there's a lot of cynicism. I feel even with that cynicism we're all still pretty committed to the mission, we all want to develop ourselves ... want to become an officer, want to be a part of that mission. Some of my best friends ... they just want to be done. Freshman year we're planning on going the 20 years [and] retiring from the Air Force, wanting to be a part of the mission for as long as possible, but now they're saying, I'm going to five and dive. ²⁸
C2M2	[Commitment] is really high when you get here and it's pretty low when you leave, when you commission. I think that's because when I was a 4-degree I didn't know the difference between a good AOC and a bad one. ²⁹ You see leadership at the highest levels here, all the generals, you don't necessarily see bad generals ... but you do see the decisions they're making, and once you're more used to it ... you start having your own ideas about how you would make this decision if you were a 3-star general or the Commandant. ³⁰ That's when you start to lower your commitment to the institution ... They're doing a good job, but kids always feel like they're getting screwed, and that's just the way it is. I think that's why the commitment lowers.
C3F1	I notice a trend that freshmen are very optimistic, very motivated. As soon as you get older and progress here, your cynicism, people get this set mindset. ... They lose that fire.
C3F3	I still believe in the core mission of the Academy, but it's just not necessarily carried out in a way that gets everybody to the end goal.
C3M1	I've kind of grown to trust the organization a little less, so my commitment to it has been a little less. I've also gotten to know the subsets of it a little better (e.g., club hockey team) ... all my teammates, I've grown really close with them and gotten a lot more committed to [them] ... and I had [an] airmanship [program] this fall, ³¹ so I got to kind of get involved with that subset of the Academy. I trust the big USAFA a little less, but I feel a lot closer to all the individual parts that make it up.

²⁸ 'Five and dive' is a term used for cadets who graduate and then serve the minimum commitment of five years.

²⁹ Air Officer Commanding (AOC) are officers in charge of cadets within a squadron.

³⁰ The Commandant is the 1-star general in charge of the Cadet Wing at USAFA.

³¹ USAFA has airmanship program for cadets including soaring and jump.

ID	Evolution of Commitment to USAFA Over Time
C3M2	<p>It's a natural thing ... after your doolie [year], your commitment to the standards ... they definitely go down quite a bit. I'll even admit for myself, a simple thing like shaving. Last year I made sure I shaved every day. This year ... I'll go one day without shaving, maybe two. ... All the ... demands and restrictions that are placed on you for nine months and then all those restrictions are pretty much just taken away, you're pretty much a free person again. I feel it's sort of like that stereotypical kid who grew up in a really, really strict household and then goes to college and then just goes buck wild. ... Not necessarily a big drop but there is a noticeable drop in commitment to this place. I already did all that nonsense 4-degree year. I don't need to worry about it now because you're out of the spotlight. [It] has shifted from you to the incoming class. As you're getting away from that spotlight, you feel like your commitment [decreases].</p>

Table G5*How Ability and Preparedness Affects Cadet Commitment to Developing as LOC*

ID	Ability and Preparedness
C1F2	<p>Academics might be a pretty big factor. I think pretty much everyone that comes here excelled, like in high school, and was probably the top of their class. So, when you come here and everyone around you is excelling too, and pretty much the same as you, I think that's kind of challenging. I came here and failed a few times; and I'm like, 'maybe I actually suck.' And you see everyone else doing really well. I think it kind of just gets to you mentally. I guess all of these things that I'm saying are relating to your mental health as well. I think that's a factor with kind of like, 'are you going to stay here?'</p>
C1M1	<p>Being committed to developing my own character, it's definitely grown over the years. Freshman year, you kind of figure out school so you can more or less goes through that; at least some cadets can. You spend your time thinking about other things, and so for me, this academic thing is temporary, I won't be in academics forever, but the thing that doesn't change is who you are as a person. I think just having the ability and the time to think about that kind of stuff is definitely something that's helped me grow.</p>
C2F2	<p>Honestly, [I] don't know the answer to that, because it's hard to make sure everyone is given the same opportunity when you have such a large variety of people and a large variety of skill levels, especially when you have people coming in that went to these really great schools where they had a lot of government funding and then others that had none. ... You're all competing for the same thing, but some people simply have more advantage than others, and I think as school starts, people start to realize that and they kind of give up.</p>
C3F2	<p>It's very different for every cadet that comes through here because we all have different backgrounds. We all have different life experiences and not everybody develops to that same level. But I also think sometimes they place so much on people across the board, and some people can't handle it, and it kind of breaks them down a little bit. An example...the honor code, when people have something that they feel is impossible for them to do on their own, but they can get help, which is also something that kind of happens sometimes. That's where that breakdown comes in, when people need help, and they can't get it and they do things out of desperation. For a lot of people that I see, it's 'operation graduation.' It's 'I need to get through this place and try to survive.' They're just constantly struggling, trying to keep their head above water, so they don't focus on development, they just focus on getting through. There are some people that are like Superman; they have no issues with anything physical, academic, military, so they can actually focus a lot more on development. ... They're just more capable in some ways.</p>

Table G6*How Personality & Upbringing Affects Cadet Commitment to Developing as LOC*

ID	Personality and Instilled Values Prior to Arriving at USAFA
C1M2	A lot of these guys seem like some of my high school buddies... [They do] not really put a lot of effort into things, but then you have it on the flip side and you have people here who are totally hardcore and going at it. What I mean to say by that is a lot of your personal development, a lot of your personal character drive comes from your upbringing, comes from what characteristics you have coming into the Academy. That's what I've seen that's been consistent throughout. . . . Social structure or a foundation growing up that instilled good habits in you, that instilled a drive and a desire to learn, and a desire to stick to your morals; the desire to help other people out. Then that would carry through into the Academy and would be your main foundation for building your character.
C1M3	It's about personal improvement. You have to realize you're not a perfect person. We often get praised as cadets for coming here ... we're the best and the brightest. But you have to keep a humble attitude because you have to realize, you're not you're not the best and brightest. I know, I'm certainly not.
C1M5	I don't think I've really been able to find out why individuals are not committed to their own development. I think that some of it might be just intrinsic.
C2F1	I've never been the kind of person to take the easy way out, ever. I think I especially saw that as a doolie. ³² I went against the flow a lot just to make sure I was doing the right thing. ... I feel like I'm one of the few cadets that tries to enforce the rules on the underclassmen. I think it's just each individual has to wrestle with themselves and decide if they want to be a better person. I don't think that even the entire system really has control of that. The natural leaders are going to rise here, and that's just because it's their mindset.
C2M1	I do think there is a certain level [of commitment] you have coming in; that commitment to start and to improve yourself. ... In any institution of the Academy's size, people are going to have different levels of that initial desire to improve themselves. And that's just the nature of any institution of this kind of magnitude.
C3F1	It's almost a process of weeding out, because to come here we're told we're the best of the best and then you get put with all the best of the best and you really start to [be] stratified ... The challenges here and the opportunities... Instead of rising to the challenge, this is just where I fall and it's that set mindset. I don't know why we go from the growth mindset to the set mindset. It may just be intrinsic threshold that we have when we're faced with challenges ... we can't overcome. I'm not sure what we could do as an institution to maybe extend that threshold or just remove the threshold at all, but I think it's more of a personal motivation rather than institutional.
C3F2	There are people I see that struggle every day with everything, and yet ... they're some of the greatest people that I know. I really think it's just depending on a person and what the circumstances do to them. A lot of it is developing grit because they're going through so many struggles, and yet they still are pushing themselves to do better in all aspects, aside from just the three objective things. They really are committed to that mission statement of being a leader of character.
C3F3	I was raised in a household that was very much like, your integrity determines who you are. If you're not an honest person, then you really don't have anything, and so, for me the character side of leadership or the integrity side of leadership has never really been an issue for me.

³² Freshman at USAFA are also called doolies or 4-degrees.

ID	Personality and Instilled Values Prior to Arriving at USAFA
C4M3	Instilled honor beforehand or just a character before you came here because you can't build everything up.

Table G7*How Goals and Priorities Influence Cadet Commitment to Developing as LOC*

ID	Goals and Priorities
C1F2	There are people here that don't really care if they have good character and becoming the best officer that they can be, but then there's other people that will take advantage of the little things and find the reasoning behind the little things that we do and how that actually does contribute to your development.
C1M1	Being a person of character, being committed to developing my own character, it's definitely grown over the years. ... For me, this academic thing is temporary; I won't be in academics forever, but the thing that doesn't change is who you are as a person.
C1M3	I know for me the commitment to be a better leader...goes hand in hand with just trying to be a better person.
C1M5	I would say just being able to focus on the end goal. ... Put in the work every day to make sure they can get to that goal.
C2F2	Both my parents were physicians and I think sometimes I want to emulate what they've done and ... apply their hard work ethic to my own life. ... My father is from Cuba and he was an immigrant. I think that a lot of his story and how hard he worked to become...an orthopedic surgeon ... and that took a lot of work because he was really, really poor and he had to pay for all of his school. I really appreciate what he did for me and for my whole family because I have three older sisters, so there's a lot of us and they had to pay for all my other sisters [college]. ... I honestly want to set myself up well enough for when I'm in the in the future. If things happen and I try and find myself in between a rock and a hard place, if I've developed myself up enough...things become easier at those points, then so be it. I think maybe the mom thing might be part of it [preparing to be a good mom].
C2F4	I think a lot of that [commitment] is intrinsically motivated.
C2M3	I would say, in general, with everything that I do, my primary mission is to be better than I was yesterday, which falls in line very easily with that idea of developing as a leader and developing in character.
C2M4	50/50 split. 50% of folks really committed to it [USAFA mission] and I think there's also some guys 'drink the Kool-Aid' a little bit too much...But I'd say probably the other 50% could care less. Some of that's just, I came here to play sports, [get a] degree and the title...not really concerned about what comes after. ... I want to prepare myself best for when I'm in charge of folks going down the road, and I don't think the academy will prepare me fully. ... I don't hold any sort of animosity towards anyone that just showed up because they got recruited ... Some guys here [are] wicked smart, got in here because of a test score or something like that, but didn't really want to be in the military. ... A lot of guys don't care, and that's fine. If admissions wants to let you [in], I don't care one way or the other, but I feel like a lot of people sort of showed up here thinking it would be one thing and it's a completely other direction and then there's not like a large incentive to not stick through it.
C2M5	My idea of success has changed a lot since I've been here ... in terms of values that have changed since I've been here; definitely the idea of success in terms of the grades you get and how you rank among your peers, while I understand that's important and I need to compete ... I can choose whether or not to engage with that measuring stick. ... I can choose whether or not I

ID	Goals and Priorities
	really want to go for the bar and really succeed, or I can say 'I'm not going to jump in the rat race' and engage in something that I think is more worth my time.
C3F1	I think it's more of a personal motivation rather than institutional.
C3F2	If they really have a solid vision for their future and they have solid goals, I think it really helps them become more committed. And the flip side of that coin is true. If they see it as, 'I'm in college, I'm here to have a good time, five and dive,' ³³ they're probably not going to develop as much.
C3F3	I see people that are pushing themselves to be better leaders, but I think that there are people here...for a free education, and then they'll serve for a few years and then they might go choose to do something else, which is completely fine. But I think [if] that's your long-term goal it affects how committed you are.
C3M1	Doesn't speak for all ICs ... ³⁴ but I have noticed that when it comes to training events or M5s or things like that, ³⁵ it's a disproportionately low number of ICs who are taking that [active role in their development.] Obviously, they have reasons for that. ... Your time is really stretched here, and they have a responsibility to their team. I'm sure they're getting a lot of good leadership out there, being on their team. Not to throw them under the bus, but...it's hard to ask yourself those questions [that] lead to that development, so if I have the option between going to play the sport that I grew up playing [and] love to play versus being introspective with some upperclassmen honor officer who I might not know very well or feel comfortable opening up with. ... I'm definitely going to pick going down to the athletic field.
C3M2	We have so many different people from so many different parts of the U.S. and different parts of the world raised [with] ... different ways of thinking. I think that leads to a differentiation in priorities. Some people ... [their] goal out of coming here is pursuing maybe a career in special warfare, cross-cross commissioning to a different branch; so what I'm going to focus on is athletics and the physical aspect, whereas maybe other cadets are...using this to sort of catapult into a grad school or med school so [they're] going to focus a lot more on academics. Other kids ... 'I just came here just to become the best officer I can be, I'm going to soak up every opportunity I can,' they're going to focus on everything or maybe just the military aspect. I feel like just differentiation and priorities is what causes that large variation in cadets seeming to care ... or to not care.
C4F2	I think the difference between motivation and driving commitment can be whether you truly did come here because you wanted to or maybe you were recruited. ... Some athletes, I feel like ... and this is definitely not speaking for all, but they came here because this was maybe the only place they were offered [a sports scholarship]. So, they don't really commit to the military aspect of it, but they're committing to their sport. I think that can play [a part in] the different levels of commitment.
C4F3	There's definitely a spectrum, there's definitely people who care a lot and are like, 'I want to be the best officer in the military, leader of character, that I can by coming out of this place.' And then there's the other side where there's a lot of people who are just like ... 'I'm here to play my sport,' and they don't really focus on much of the ... building [a] leader of character, looking at the long term, I'm going to be an officer in the military.
C4F4	I definitely think the majority [are] very committed because we made the commitment to come here, to become officers, to develop ourselves, but there are always those few who you see walking around the halls and they're just trying to finish the four years and get out of here. And

³³ 'Five and dive' is a term used for cadets who graduate and then serve the minimum commitment of five years.

³⁴ Intercollegiate athletes (ICs) are cadets who play on one of the 27 division one sports at USAFA.

³⁵ M5s are a period of the day dedicated to military training.

ID	Goals and Priorities
	they're not trying to focus on themselves [or] take the opportunity that we've been given here and use it to develop themselves [into] someone that would be a leader of character.
C4M3	I think it [commitment] has a lot to do with ... your motivation for being here... Some people don't always come here for the right reasons. Some athletes come here just to play their sport. I've seen that in my squad. ... ³⁶ A lot of those people aren't as committed to what the Air Force wants us to do, they're just kind of committed to what they want to do, what their sport wants them to do. ... I feel like it's different for every person, honestly.

Table G8

Perspective – Seeing Opportunities Rather Than Barriers (How It Affects Commitment to

Developing as LOC)

ID	Opportunities Rather Than Barriers
C1F1	I think the Academy is very much what you make it. I think some people really internalize that mission and seek to develop themselves. But I think that it's also very possible to just sort of stay under the radar for four years, not really pursue any big leadership roles or any opportunities for development. I think that, obviously, it's a spectrum. But I do think that there's two sides to the coin. Some people are internalizing that and taking advantage of the opportunities here, but some people, if they're not forced to take advantage of any opportunities, they're not necessarily challenged and developed in the same way. I think it's definitely a choice. You have to pursue the mission to get anything out of it.
C1F2	With some of the lead classes ... a lot of people don't really have a great perspective on that. I know I'm one of those people that complains about it a lot because it seems like busy work sometimes. But every time I have done an assignment for that class. ... I'm like [this is] kind of dumb I had to write a few sentences about this or that. But it actually does make me think, and I think it's something that will stick with you [and] contribute to that development in the long run. But I do think it's more of an inner drive ... what you make of your own character and what you want to do with that.
C1M1	It's difficult to always see it, [to not] see things happening as negative, and I think you get too immersed in the 'woe is me' mentality that you stop thinking about, 'this might suck, but how can I learn from this? How can I become a better person?'
C1M5	I have a different perspective. I grew up in Nigeria ... the Academy feels like a lot of awesome opportunities for me.
C2F4	I think a lot of that [commitment] is intrinsically motivated and [based on] their personal experiences. I think that's a huge factor because I met some awesome people who just got kind of screwed over by the system.
C2M3	There's a ton of resources here and there's so many different paths that you can take, which is something that I've come to realize within the past six months. ... You would think a military service academy, we're all very cookie cutter, doing the same exact thing, but you can take so many different directions of what you're doing here and you kind of have to take that initiative yourself to do that. It really promotes you determining how you want to get better and seeking those development opportunities.

³⁶ Squadron or squad is the basic unit or grouping at USAFA, 40 cadet squadrons at USAFA.

Table G9

Perspective – Seeing the Big Picture (How It Affects Commitment to Developing as LOC)

ID	Seeing the Big Picture
C1F2	I felt like there wasn't a job or ... career for me that I would actually be interested in in the long run. Until recently, I've become very interested in the Space Force. I would say the last two years, that's kind of been my driving factors.
C1F3	This example can go either way. If someone has some sort of disciplinary issues at any point, I think they can really check out. I've seen it even as a sophomore, especially as people start to care a little bit less if they get in trouble. I've seen people do total 180's and they're a lot more involved in the squadron and involved in their own personal development.
C1M4	A lot of people, if you're constantly thinking people are out to get us, they're not here for our development, they're just here to make sure we follow the rules and [are] always the bad guys, then that's the type of person generally always blame someone, and they don't seek out opportunities to grow themselves. Whereas if you [have the mindset] I don't know everything that's going on, maybe they have my best interest in doing this to me. I'm just going to focus on myself and try to develop myself as a person. [Those] people I find tend to grow and try to develop themselves.
C2F3	Realizing that I wasn't going to get a slot for a medical school kind of hindered me, not wanting to improve myself, I was just kind of in this really low state, I was thinking I don't want to be here, I don't want to be in the Air Force anymore.
C3F2	Maturity, because when people can see the future ... what their actions now, what impact they can have, what their future will look like, I think they become more committed. For me, putting in the work now, keeping my grades up and just performing as best as I can and improving myself. ... I see that that's going to allow me to potentially stay in for as long as I want to make a career out of things.
C3F3	He [my AOC] actually would bring people in to talk to us ... the officers have been getting coffee with us. I think that it's in those conversations with people that have more experience than you guys really fosters leadership development, because you can sit in a classroom and lecture all you want, but I think it's the experience that actually gives the motivation like becoming better leaders.
C4F1	75% of the wing, probably not during COVID times, their commitment is there. They want to do this. They're here for it. It may suck right now, but that end result is worth it. One of my favorite quotes is, 'A moment of pain is worth a lifetime of glory.' Being here is kind of that moment of pain., but once you graduate, the experiences and the opportunities you're going to have are so much more worth it. For the people that realize that, they're the ones who are like, let's just buckle down, grind through, we'll get this, but for the people that don't necessarily realize that and are just here kind of going through the motions... not really taking up every opportunity, they're the ones whose commitment is kind of faltering.
C4F3	There are times where we have briefs or meetings when it actually hits me, when they ... give a real-world example of where they use this in their life ... this actually matters. It makes me grow and actually pay attention to what they're saying because they've actually shown me that they've applied this thing that they're teaching us right now.

Table G10

Perspective – Embracing a Growth Mindset (How It Affects Commitment to Developing as LOC)

ID	Fixed Mindset Versus Growth Mindset
C1F1	I definitely think there's a there's a very big range. ... It's really up to you how much you take on and how much you pursue increased responsibility or development opportunities. You have a group of cadets who will pursue pretty much any opportunity [and] will really put themselves out there. And then on the other end of the spectrum, you have cadets who just [have the] '2.0 and go' mentality, just trying to graduate with the minimum effort. Then you've got a lot of cadets in the middle; they'll put themselves out there and they'll pursue opportunities for development and maybe not to the extent that core group does ... it is definitely possible to just slide by with minimal effort. You have to pursue the mission to get anything out of it. ... I'm much more willing to take chances and put myself out there [than I was] as a freshman. I think we all sort of get in the mindset of ... just got to survive another day. Just don't want to get ... called out by upperclassmen ... you just try to survive. I think a couple of experiences or roles here have encouraged me to be more willing to take chances and put myself out there and to not be as concerned about failing in a leadership role ... more of the growth mindset. Just more willingness to fail and take on risk.
C3F1	It's almost a weeding out [process] because to come here we're told we're the best of the best and then you get put with all the best of the best and you really start to [be] stratified. ... Instead of rising to the challenge [some cadets think] this is just where I fall and it's that set mindset. I don't know why we go from the growth mindset to the set mindset. It may be just be intrinsic threshold that we have when we're faced with challenges. ... I think it's more of a personal motivation rather than institutional.

Table G11

Perspective – Focusing on the Collective Team (How It Affects Commitment to LOC)

ID	Focusing on the Collective Team
C1M2	Being in a flight commander position now, I realized a lot that my decisions...influence what my people or how I treat the people that are following me. For example, if I broke the rules as a 3-degree or 2-degree, ³⁷ I could push it off my back, no big deal because I didn't get caught, but now when I'm breaking the rules as a Firstie. ... I'm on this panel for my underclassman and deciding what their punishments are when they break the same rules that I broke...that's a learning lesson for me that I've been learning right now because I'm making decisions for them and punishing them for things that I did and that was a huge thing for me to figure out.
C4F2	Producing someone [with] character that can lead others ... that is the main goal, and to me ... take that personally. I would want someone that's leading me to have integrity and be brought up under stressful circumstances, so they know how to handle those things.
C4M3	Developing yourself here, it's not all just focused on yourself ... they stress the team aspect so much. I think that if you focus on the team and developing the team, then that actually develops yourself as well, and I think that's a really key part to try and get across here. That's huge.

³⁷ USAFA uses the term firstie for seniors, 2-degrees for juniors, 3-degrees for sophomores and 4-degree for freshman.

Table G12

How Social Exchange Affects Cadet Commitment to Development as LOC

ID	Social Exchange
C4M1	During basic I had one of the best leaders I've ever had ... he was the squadron commander ... after a particularly rough day... he came around and made sure we were doing all right. If you had a personal problem or something that made you feel terrible, he talked to you. That was a really big motivator for me. Our squadron commander, who was incredibly busy ... turned his radio off for an hour talking to us, gave us words of encouragement. ... At the same time, you see other cadets who just become cynical and hate everything about this place ... joke about form 34ing. ³⁸ It's a really big drag on your momentum. It's as if you are trying to sprint to the finish line and suddenly someone put a parachute on you. Decisions made my upper leadership can be confusing but are exasperated in how bad they are by other cadets.
C4F3	I think it's a lot of personal experience of people that they've met and told them stories like this is what I got to do out of here. Then they realized...I'm going to be doing this and it motivates them. ... I'm going to have an impact on people, and it switches in their head. I need to pay attention. I need to develop myself as a leader more.
C4F1	Snide comments as we were passing. ... Some cadets as they progressed through the chain, some of that power goes a little bit to their head. ... They are at the top of the totem pole at this point. I think sometimes that can get in the way of just being a generally nice person or a good person.
C1F4	One of my friends who was in wing and said it was like the worst experience they had. That's what's kept me from being a 10, because I want to take these positions to improve myself, but then again, I'm afraid of what I might encounter in those positions.

Table G13

How Social Influence Affects Cadet Commitment to Their Development as LOC

ID	Social Influence
C1M1	I think the wealth of officers that we have here, both in classes and as AOCs and senior enlisted here in AMT's, ³⁹ I think that's a great source of building character because you get the war stories. While they're primarily there to teach you academic material, I think there's [an] alternative service they provide us, that they give so much experience and knowledge ... and it's critically important.
C1F2	I think some factors that contribute to that [commitment] are definitely the people you surround yourself with. A few of my friends that are ICs, ⁴⁰ there's always that IC stereotype ...you can definitely tell that there's some people if you show that you care about leadership, your job and squad, sometimes [there's] a negative connotation with that. People are like 'you're kind of weird why do you care about that?' And then there's other people that are in those jobs with you and kind of excel in those upper leadership positions that are more of a positive influence in that role of character, [that] take the opportunities that you have here, because this is going to

³⁸ Voluntarily leaving USAFA requires filling out a form 34 often referred to as 'form 34ing.'

³⁹ Air Officer Commanding (AOC) are officers in charge of cadets within a squadron. Academy Military Trainers (AMTs) are senior enlisted Air Force personnel who train and mentor cadets at USAFA.

⁴⁰ Intercollegiate Athletes (ICs) are cadets who are participate in sports at USAFA.

ID	Social Influence
	contribute to who you are once you graduate. I would say it's the people that you surround yourself with that's really important.
C1F3	Why different responses to probation or discipline? I think that cadets who take more of a positive turn do better when they talk to other people who have been in the same situation or who are currently going through it. Especially thinking how a lot of these things are handled on a squadron basis and you have to work with your squadron honor officer...those people who are mentoring them and it's constructive.
C1M5	Having a bunch of people, friends that...they wanted something, they saw an opportunity to get it, they knew there was going to be challenges along the way, they kept pushing; just getting to see the same individual still here, pushing it and putting in the work every day to make sure they can get to that goal. It's one of the reasons why I stayed. I would say definitely motivation to peers.
C2F1	Leadership, individual leaders make me want to be a better person, but those leaders are usually the people that hold themselves accountable, saying 'you're going to be here for Thanksgiving, I'm going to be here for Thanksgiving.' I'm in the same boat as you versus the leaders that act like an authoritarian and get up and lay out these blanket rules, but I don't really think that they hold themselves to the same standards.
C2F3	Things that have helped [my commitment is] definitely the people, my AOC right now. She's exactly what kind of officer I want to be. She's really helped the people... It's kind of like a family.
C2M2	There's a big external influence from friends and family.
C2M5	[Commitment] correlates pretty heavily with whatever club or team that you're involved in. Even within a team, there may be a different ... people who are committed more or less to the idea of ... making yourself better. I'd like to think that to some degree, everybody here is just looking to get something done to completion, but again, I don't think that's enough. I think just making it through isn't enough in terms of what really makes somebody committed to this place. Sometimes it might be dumb luck; you happen to hang around ... some guys that just get fired up about being here and getting a chance to serve and getting a chance to improve yourself ... I think sometimes it has a lot to do with the people you surround yourself with.
C3F2	I've found my handful of close-knit people I trust. Thankfully I am involved in a club I am very passionate about and makes me want to do better.
C3F3	The things that have pushed me most towards the mission of developing character, I think would just be interactions with other people.
C3F4	I think probably a lot of times it's stuff that goes on at home. If your attention is divided and pulled away, it's a lot harder for you to focus on your own character development and just development as a person in general.
C4F4	I know during basic training we had six cadre and they were absolutely amazing ... ⁴¹ They wanted us to be better, and because of that, because they showed respect for us, we wanted to be better for them.

⁴¹ Basic training is the initial indoctrination experience into the military at USAFA. Cadre are the upper-class cadets that conduct the training of the basic cadets.

Table G14*How COVID-19 Affects Cadet Commitment to Developing as LOC*

ID	COVID-19
C2F1	I think that this year we're seeing a little bit more pressure upon the Superintendent [and] the Commandant, ⁴² with COVID restrictions and the greater mental health risk that we saw this past semester. ... I do think we need to shift gears a little bit and realize that we're going through a pandemic. I wish that the honor code could be adjusted in some regard and realizing that maybe these cadets, I'm not saying there's an excuse for cheating, but when they went home they were in charge of their families and they were making extra money for their families, I just wish that that was taken into consideration a little bit more and that those punishments were individualized versus everybody just has the same blanket punishment.
C3F2	With permanent party, ⁴³ it seems like they're kind of out of touch with reality to an extent, because a lot of us are cadets, we have friends, we have significant others. If we isolate and only have anything to do with our roommate, we're going to go crazy. I think it's really important to consider the fact that we need to socialize to an extent. It can be done safely. We don't have to have house parties every weekend, but I think it's important for cadets to realize, we know you're human, we know you need friends to talk to.
C4F1	If you had asked me last year when COVID wasn't a thing and there weren't all these restrictions going around, I feel like the answer would probably be a little bit different. I feel like a lot of people are just kind of going through the motions. ... I feel like in a normal environment, people would be a lot more dedicated and would be wanting to really improve themselves like they always say, 'one percent better every day.' I feel like especially just mentally, things have been so hard that I feel like everybody ... [has a] common goal, let's just make it through, at this point.
C4F3	I haven't really seen the mission too much...especially with the COVID environment that we're in. I haven't really been ... trained to be like a leader yet because we just don't have a lot of responsibility. ... We don't do really anything except, ... go to class and follow the rules right now.

Table G15*How Cynicism Affects Commitment to Developing as LOC*

ID	Cynicism
C1M1	I think cynicism definitely hinders [commitment].
C2F4	I'd say that a majority of cadets get pretty cynical about this place and that could be different reasons for everyone. ... I think most kids here are just working hard all the time and still getting treated like children by upper leadership. I think that's the frustration of most kids they feel like they've proved themselves and are worthy of more trust.
C2M5	I'd like to start off with saying it's incredibly hard to overcome the entrenched cynicism and pessimism that already exists here.

⁴² The Superintendent is the 3-star general in charge of USAFA. The Commandant is the 1-star general in charge of the Cadet Wing (CW) at USAFA.

⁴³ Permanent party refers to the officer and enlisted members in charge of running USAFA.

ID	Cynicism
C3F2	Some of the things that definitely hinder people trying to develop character would honestly be other cynical people. Cynicism is rampant here.
C4F4	The negativity here is sometimes really, really intense and it can sometimes weigh down on you. ... A lot of people are very negative, so it's hard to focus.

Table G16*How Lack of Empowerment Affects Commitment to Developing as LOC*

ID	Lack of Empowerment
C1F3	I think the Academy does a great job developing followers of character more than anything. We're told we're leading the way ... but there's not a lot of room right now for cadets to be creative. I'm noticing that being in group for the past two years. Last year, I worked on recognition. ⁴⁴ This year I was the military officer trying to do formations and we're told exactly what to do from the permanent party and comms tower, ⁴⁵ and we're just rolling with it, and it teaches us...I know not to talk bad against these decisions to people who are below me, and that's a good lesson to instill.
C1M5	The leadership aspect when you have kids actually leading, let them make decisions and let them fail and learn from it or let them succeed, because if you tell them everything to do or there is a rule for everything, they're not going to be innovative, and we're going to just say 'whatever' when being told what to do every time.
C2F4	Upper leadership treats us like children...I think when permanent party micromanages cadet leadership, that really hinders us learning how to step up and how to lead. ... Ensuring that a lot of squadrons are actually cadet run; I think that's the most beneficial and that's the best way I think we can become better leaders here.
C2M2	I would go back to [cadets having a] much more active role in their own development. M5s, ⁴⁶ everyone gets sent the PowerPoint slides and cadets know that cadets did not make this slide...cadets just want to do it their own way. Someone said this and it really stuck with me, they said, 'They call USAFA the leadership laboratory, but lately I've been asking myself who it's a laboratory for, because sometimes it feels like it's a leadership laboratory for the AOC who's never been in a command position and now is making decisions that you don't agree with, and you're kind of stuck; the 0-6 whose making these decisions about curriculum, it seems to change every single year ... since I've been here.' ⁴⁷
C3F2	There was also like a code of sorts for listening to your leadership, and it's super strict. It's like 'thou shalt,' kind of a shut up and color attitude; when I tell you to do something or I tell you to jump, don't question it, you ask 'how high?' I think it's good to encourage people to think about why they're doing what they're doing and not just getting results. They don't care about the source of the problem or calls for delay in getting a result, they just want the results.

⁴⁴ Recognition is the culminating training event for 4-degrees before they are recognized and fully accepted into the cadet wing.

⁴⁵ Commandant's or Comm's tower is where the Commandant's office is and where most CW policy is created.

⁴⁶ M5 is a period dedicated to military training.

⁴⁷ 0-6 is the officer rank of Colonel in the U.S. Air Force.

Table G17*How Subculture Affects Commitment to Developing as LOC*

ID	Subcultures
C1F1	You see across a wide variety of groups, groups at the airfield, some of the teams, some clubs and organizations up here on the hill. I don't think it's necessarily one group, but I think a lot of times if someone does belong to some sort of group. You see more of like a culture of development and growth. I think it's a lot of times the people who don't really have they don't share a common identity with a group.
C3F3	I'm in the scholarship program and I'm also down at the airfield, and I'm surrounded by the people that are trying to better themselves and become better leaders that will be able to lead with integrity once they do.
C3M2	One of [the] natural stereotypes that comes to mind is ICs; they're going to be really focused on their sport because that's one of the reasons why they're here. They obviously want to do well in it...They might be a bit more focused on that. Granted, there are some ... people in that group ... [who] want to be able to commit to both, but I say they definitely ... shift the focus to their sport rather than just their personal development. That was seen with my class last year and I can sort of see it with the 4-degrees this year ... following the 4-degree ROEs. ... ⁴⁸ The opposite ... Honor Guard ... these are the standards; we're going to adhere to them at all times. [This is] an example of each group. I guess for people in the middle who try to do both.
C3M3	Fairly stereotypical, but I would say athletes overall [are] kind of more focused on their sports. That's not to say that they're not great people. But I would say overall, they're definitely more focused on their sport.
C3M4	The guys down at the airfield are pretty committed to this because ... they get a lot of unique opportunities down there, just like the instructor pilot program, the jump program and stuff like that. They're super committed to this place because that's a very unique USAFA thing. They see that this place is more than... all the boring stuff. And I think that that helps a lot.
C4M4	[Commitment] depends on what group of cadets you're with ... you can break it up into three groups. You can break them into ICs, the intellectual ... nerdy group; then you have your hardcore military group, and they don't really intermingle. ICs are very motivated to do their sports, but everything else is just kind of ... they're not really there to [do]. ... The culture in general is more just about being lax and ... getting away from the hill. ... ⁴⁹ I think there are some groups that ... separate themselves from the Academy. You have your intellectual group...they're not a group of athletes, and it makes it hard for them to carry out even the military duty (e.g., training and parades). That just bothers me personally, because I know I don't understand it, like you're standing ... it's not like it's something hard to do. And then you have your hardcore military group ... they're very into the mission and all that, but sometimes they just go too far. They don't understand that ...we don't become robots because we have a mission. ... I think each group misses out on it. ... I definitely think coming in freshman year ... they realize that there are just groups that don't ... and then they sort of hit their own independent little walls where they're missing out on the development process.

⁴⁸ Rules of Engagement (ROEs) are the standards cadets must follow while at USAFA.

⁴⁹ The hill is a slang term for the area where the cadet wing resides, and military training is conducted.

Table G18

How Workload at USAFA Affects Cadet Commitment to Developing as a LOC

ID	Workload
C1M1	Being a person of character, being committed to developing my own character, and it's definitely grown over the years. Freshman year ... [you] do school and kind of figure out school so you can more or less get through it.
C2F4	It's freshman year [you're] bright eyed, bushy tailed; of course, they're all going to be highly motivated. Then the grind kind of wears you down and you get complacent, which I think happens with most cadets.
C3F2	I also think sometimes they place so much on people just across the board and some people can't handle it and it kind of breaks them down a little bit.

Table G19

How Personality Affects Commitment to USAFA

ID	Personality's Impact on Commitment to USAFA
C2M3	A huge majority of people that come here are type-A people and are driven for whatever reason that they end up that way ... they want to go out and have that internal drive.
C3F4	If I'm going to be honest, it's been very tough ... with COVID and everything else ... coming back to school after two years and trying to make friends and feel like ... a valued member of my squad, but my commitment has still been really high, and I've been able to keep working hard and keep grinding and talk to my leadership and see what I can do better. I'm actually growing my character and becoming more committed to being an officer.
C4F3	A lot of it is just like personal ... you have to personally want to be committed to the Academy. It's hard to get someone to do something when they don't want to do it ... they have to be able to be open minded and change their mind.
C4M3	I'm all in. I try and have that mentality with everything I do. Full commitment; that is how I was raised, how I was developed.

Table G20

How Goals Affect Commitment to USAFA

ID	Goals
C1M5	If they feel as though the Air Force Academy is preparing them for the goals that they have in mind, or at least gives them an avenue to pursue that goal, they're going to be committed. For example, I think they started doing this a little bit, but for individuals that want to [be a] pilot, I don't see any reason why we cannot have a specific goal every semester that gets dedicated to either flight simulation or learning ... something that contributes to that end goal.
C2F2	I'm a lot more committed to the Academy now than I was during I-day, ⁵⁰ I think because I didn't really know what I wanted to do, and as it's become a lot clearer, I have a goal, and I think because I have a Space Force interview, which I'm pretty excited about. So, that's my goal for

⁵⁰ In processing day or I-day is the first day cadets come to USAFA to begin basic training.

ID	Goals
	the next few weeks. So now I'm like, 'Go Air Force.' I'm really trying to get this really good job that I think is going to help me.
C4M2	My roommate is super committed to this place. It doesn't matter what happens to him, his commitment is through the roof because he has a goal for the Air Force. He wants to be a STO, ⁵¹ he's doing everything he can, even as a 4-degree, to get to that point. On the other hand, my other roommate, he doesn't really have a goal for the Air Force. He is here for the free college, and that's all right. He is still a good guy, still doing good in school but the biggest factor for anybody here ... is just do you have a long-term goal other than just graduating from this place. At the same time, I don't have a specific goal in the Air Force or specific job, but I didn't come here to five and dive.
C2M3	What are the factors with making cadets pursue things and others do not? I think that it's whether or not you desire to be good at something and improve it.

Table G21

Perspective—Seeing Opportunities Rather than Barriers (How it Affects Commitment to USAFA)

ID	Opportunities Rather Than Barriers
C3F1	I'm actually working on multiple diversity inclusion efforts. ... I feel like cadets don't take ownership of their role like the they don't take to all the opportunities available to them. And I feel like they assume they [have]less power and ability than they actually have. Like I found like when I put forth the effort for something, people opened doors for me. I feel like a lot of [its] ... this closed mindset. In in terms of diversity and inclusion ... [cadets] come from different backgrounds and there are positive things to that. But there is a lot of just negative things that go on here. Negative remarks. I've seen negative remarks. I've heard in person that I just want to kind of change and make ... [people] feel uncomfortable doing that and make everyone feel comfortable confronting that when it happens.
C3F2	[Bad] go on here and I want to see that change and sometimes that just means being a better person and helping others where it's possible myself.
C3M1	Given all the training changes that happened last year that I'm sure you're aware of, it wasn't so much the changes that really bother me because I was kind of just along for the ride. But the way a lot of ... my upperclassmen reacted really kind of gave me insight into the kind of leader that I want to be versus the leaders that I saw.
C3M3	My freshman year, the first semester was pretty rough academically. Prog my freshman year, ⁵² I had a 1.3 GPA and I just really struggled. I was thinking of quitting, but I [decided] I was going to stay and do my part and if that wasn't good enough, the Academy could let me go. That was my attitude ... and then I just kept going from there. I would say that was a pretty defining moment in why I chose to stay, and after that it just got better.
C4F1	I decided to join the triathlon team. Already this year I have done an Olympic distance triathlon, which was somewhere around 35 miles all in all. And that was the ... longest endurance I had ever done. Then last weekend I did a half marathon, just because I thought that was something that if I had been at any other school, I probably wouldn't have done ... but then I came here and I was like ... 'Why not give it a shot?' Down the road, I really want to do jump team and soaring and all those kinds of opportunities ... I'm just curious what else is going to happen, and so for me, that's motivation enough to stay because I never would have guessed I would have done a

⁵¹ Special Tactics Officer is a specific special operations career field within the Air Force.

⁵² Midterm of the semester when grades are given is often referred to as prog.

ID	Opportunities Rather Than Barriers
	triathlon or a half marathon within the first three months of being here. I'm just excited to see what's going to happen down the road.
C4F2	COVID has taken away a lot of stuff, which, that's no one's fault and it's good because they're taking measures [to keep us] healthy ... [Need to] push through 4- degree because that is your worst year. I know it only gets better. I'm still going to have hard times throughout the Academy, but each year I'll get closer with the people around me. I'll have more opportunities to do things. ... I'll be closer to the person I want to be when I graduate.
C4F3	They have to be able to be open minded and change their mind ... I feel like a lot of people eventually get there. But at the start, it's pretty rough. ... [Felt] like, 'What's the point? Why am I here? Especially now ... why can't we go home?' But they're like, 'It's central to the mission that we're here, we're building you as a leader of character.' It just takes time for you to realize we're here because we need to grow together, because that's how we're going to [become] better leaders of character. ... Being here for one another and being able to deal with circumstances like this will grow your resiliency and how you [will] be able to treat other people.
C4M2	Benefit of COVID and being a Doolie in general is you see all of the poor leadership of upperclassmen who think they've been here an extra year and it makes them entitled to be a jerk to you.

Table G22

Perspective – Seeing the Big Picture (How It Affects Commitment to USAFA)

ID	Seeing the Big Picture
C2M4	This is more so a means to an end, but it's definitely not the 'end all be all' kind of thing. I think some other folks struggle quite a bit; they don't have the perspective of what happens when they leave here, and if this is all you knew, you didn't know how the military operates outside of this place could definitely be pretty disheartening for some folks. ... I think it's kind of where those folks see themselves a decade from now. ... I think that probably the biggest factor is what they see their future as and if they see the Academy benefiting them in the long run or not.
C2M5	I don't think that's quite as high a priority, because the tendency here, especially when things get hard ... a lot of people ... run with their head down and stick their nose to the grindstone. That keeps them from looking around and seeing their environment and how they can change, and it's easier said than done to be able to have that wide view, the bird's eye view. ... I don't think that the commitment exists quite as much on the organizational level, because the tendency to just be swamped and focus on getting what you need to get done for yourself.
C3F2	A lot of the people struggle and yet they still overcome everything. I think a lot of that has to do with their past and what they see for their future, and they look at the broader scope of things more so than, 'I just need to survive four years.'
C3F4	I'm a lot older than ... a lot of my classmates, and I think that helped my perspective a lot, and I learned how to be a different person, a better person.
C3M3	I would say being away [mission trip] from it [USAFA] gave me a great perspective about what it does for people and how it develops people. I was always intending on coming back to the Academy, but after being gone, I just realized what it does, how unique it is ... such a high caliber and that for me just made me want to come back.
C3M4	I'm still super committed just because I know the heritage of this place, because of my dad. I know that a lot of cadets ... they're pretty committed and ... then after that, it really drops off just because there's no incentive to be committed. I still put a lot of effort into ... trying to make

ID	Seeing the Big Picture
	this place better because I know how important it is. But a lot of cadets I feel don't see ... it because they don't have any real outside perspective on how important this place can be.
C4F2	I think it's putting it into perspective that we do have a guaranteed job and career and that we are working for something greater already.
C4F3	Even though it does suck here ... we know next year it's going to get better because we'll have more freedoms and liberties, even after recognition. Everyone ... just can't wait for recognition. People still just want to stay here, for the people, for the education.
C4M2	This place is really hard to stay motivated if you do not see yourself somewhere in ten years or even five years. If you are just here for the education, you are kicking yourself in the chin before you even get started at this place.
C4M4	I feel like my commitment [to USAFA] hasn't changed. ... I was pretty motivated coming in ... this is where I wanted to be. This is the career I wanted to follow. There was never really any lack of motivation. Even with things that I may disagree with or things that have gone different than I maybe pictured, I don't think it's changed my view about the military or being committed in general. I think part of that is due [to conversations with] my dad. There's very much a big picture view that I have on what this is, and I know it's four years and then I know there's the possible 20 years afterwards.

Table G23

Perspective – Focusing on the Collective Team (How It Affects Commitment to USAFA)

ID	Individual vs. Collective Perspective
C1F3	I think I'm more committed to the institution and looking around and really wanting to see a positive change happen, even if that's after I'm gone. I want to see the dorms improve. I want to see them stop being so cynical all the time, and even if I don't see those effects, I would be really happy if it did happen.
C1M5	I definitely am committed to helping make it [USAFA] better even after I'm gone. ... I'm actually the squadron commander for my squadron right now. I feel like I'm trying to do my best to invest as much into the underclassmen as much as possible just to make sure that, they feel a little bit more prepared than I am by the time they're getting ready to commission and feel like the institution has actually prepared [them] as opposed to them having to figure it out by themselves.
C2F1	I think it's just that feeling of responsibility that I'm in charge of people. I wouldn't even say I even have the greatest amount of faith in the officers here. It's just, I look at the 3-degrees and I look at the 4-degrees and I can kind of see myself in them a little bit and I knew I was standing in their place just a few years ago. I know that they might be struggling right now with the pandemic, with their grades, because USAFA is a hard place. I think my commitment really comes from making sure that they're OK and making sure that I pay it forward just like the upperclassmen that I had. They pushed me to be better than I ever thought I could be. I think that that's the main reason I'm here. I still have a really close relationship with my basics from the summer, just making sure they're going in the right direction, holding them accountable because somebody else did it for me.
C2M4	I just want to get in there and shield my people a little bit from some of the stuff that comes from up top and make sure my guys are taken care of. I really enjoy it. That's probably the biggest reason I'm still here and that's my favorite part of the Academy.
C3M1	There's definitely a variety; there's a lot of people who are definitely here because they can be and because it benefits them on a less inspirational level.

ID	Individual vs. Collective Perspective
C3F1	I could selfishly leave and do what I want to do elsewhere, but ... I feel a commitment to helping others stay on track and improve the environment. ... If we fail as a team or as a force it doesn't matter if I'm doing great.
C3F2	Sometimes that just means being a better person and helping others.
C3F4	I definitely think once you come to the Academy and join the bigger team ... the Academy team and the Air Force team, it's a lot easier to get committed and get on board.
C4M3	It doesn't always feel like it now, but ... we're in the military and we're serving the greatest nation on earth. I feel like the American people deserve my absolute best and my teammates deserve my absolute best. That's just where my motivation comes from.

Table G24

Perspective – Gaps Between Expectation and Reality (How It Affects Commitment to USAFA)

ID	Gap Between Expectation and Reality
C1M1	Definitely when I started out, I kind of had a good feel for how it would be here, because the Falcon [scholarship] kind of prepared me a little bit for the rigors physically in basic and then a little bit academically, but overall, I didn't think academics were as bad as I had anticipated. I definitely had a brighter outlook on this place I'd say coming in here my first year here compared to where I am now.
C1M3	It's ... hypocritical for them to say that you matter, your health is important to us, and then they turn around and say 'no, and the mission matters, so we're going to keep you here. We're going to make sure that you guys graduate,' things like that. It'd be better if they just said, 'Guys, we have a mission to do and that's the most important thing for us right now,' instead of essentially just lying and saying you guys matter the most ... I'd say one major one [factor hindering commitment] for me is how much it looks like public image matters a whole lot to the Academy and that's something that I didn't really think would [be] such a large factor in the decisions that the Academy would make. I thought being another military institution they'd kind of shoulder off the opinions of the public because we know what's right, we know what's better, and that's what we're going to do. That is kind of not what's going on. It's kind of turned me away from it a little bit [e.g., football games and marching] things like that, ... seems like you don't value the time of your people and you're using us as kind of like a pony show.
C1M5	I think Firsties lost a little bit of the commitment in the system. We feel like we were not prepared for our jobs. ... A lot of us felt like you just came and told us like a couple of weeks before it was time for us to put in our job requests or job applications ... new rules that you have to follow through to get this job, even though they realize that they didn't prepare us for those rules ... to get this job that was never told to us before, all four years.
C2M4	If you came here to play a sport and the Academy said, 'OK, come here to play this sport,' and this isn't really what they told you that you're going to get into when they recruited you. I don't hold any sort of animosity towards anyone that just showed up because they got recruited. ... Some guys here [are] wicked smart, got in here because of a test score or something like that, but didn't really want to be in the military ... A lot of guys don't care, and that's fine. If admissions wants to let you [in], I don't care one way or the other, but I feel like a lot of people sort of showed up here thinking it would be one thing and it's a completely other direction.
C3F1	It wasn't the challenge I thought it would be. ... I found it a bit easier than I expected.
C3F2	Some of the things ... just a lack of reality for them. They have these goals and they come up with these things on paper that sound great, but in practice it's really horrible. It just doesn't go over well, or it just makes people miserable without us seeing a real purpose.

ID	Gap Between Expectation and Reality
C3F4	I think there's a ton of things [decreasing commitment] like different rules being enacted ... new changes causing a lot of complaining and often times a lot of people just becoming discouraged by the leadership.
C3M1	I'm sure [the answer] is the same from everyone that the experience is different from what we were expecting because I don't really know what to expect. The focus is still definitely keeping my grades up and doing everything to still become a doctor, because I feel that's the best way that I could serve, so that really hasn't changed. The biggest change would just be, when you're on the inside and looking at this place from the outside, the Academy does a great job of advertising, so everything looks all glorious from [the] outside and everything is shiny, new, and well run. Then you get here and you kind of get to see. ... I probably learned just as much about leadership from my superior's failures as I have from what they've actually taught me.
C4M2	My brother went here last year, and he's given me all these reports about the Academy and obviously with COVID this year it's very different than last year. I came on IDAY with expectations, ⁵³ and basic went the opposite direction from that. You can't blame anyone for COVID, it's hard to stay committed to USAFA when we've done one military training this whole time. We haven't had very good introductions to our upperclassmen. I don't have much of a connection to anyone at USAFA outside of the doolies in my squadron. This is in large part due to COVID. ... The other part of that is you don't get much; it seems like the upperclassmen don't really care. Our AOC is a great guy, but outside of that they make it so hard for upperclassmen to care because there's mountains of paperwork you have to get done to even do an hour-long training session, so the results of that is doolies who are just going to school and not really involved with USAFA. Commitment level to USAFA this year isn't very high because I could be doing this at ROTC. ... We haven't done anything, and of course I hope that changes when COVID ends. ... I've noticed a big trend of doolies just going through the motions. We don't feel like we've earned it, we don't have the sense of pride you get from training sessions.

Table G25

Perspective – Perceived Locus of Control (How It Affects Commitment to USAFA)

ID	Locus of Control
C1M1	Cynicism is bred from a feeling of not being able to change the situation you're in, whether that's true or not. I mean, you see it throughout the world today. A lot of people think that they can't change the situation they're in, and so they just complain a lot. I think definitely some of it is attributed to the environment, but I guess the feedback loop of cadets just kind of having conversations about being cynical and just disliking this place in conversation definitely doesn't help.
C1M2	Being in a flight commander position now, I realized a lot that my decisions ... influence how I treat the people that are following me.
C1M5	I feel like from my enlisted time to now, [I] have regressed as an adult, because now I feel like I have to ask for certain things that normally I would have just been able to take an initiative to do when I was enlisted.
C2F2	During basic I hated my life and I really wanted to leave during the first week. I think everyone experiences that a little bit, but I thought that a lot of my cadre would tell me, 'I have a 2.5

⁵³ In processing Day or IDay is the first day cadets come to USAFA for basic training.

	GPA,' and I had a lot of panic for some reason. I was like ready to pack my bags and go because initially I wanted to be a flight surgeon.
C2M2	You see leadership at the highest levels here, all the generals; you don't necessarily see bad generals, ... but you do see the decisions they're making, and once you're more used to it, ... you start having your own ideas about how you would make this decision if you were a 3-star general or the Commandant. That's when you started to lower your commitment to the institution, because I know I can't do better, but that doesn't stop me. When ... I would think of something better. ... I would find a way, and whether or not that's true, I know it's not true. They're doing a good job, but kids always feel like they're getting screwed, and that's just the way it is. I think that's why the commitment lowers.
C2M3	The diffusion of responsibility is a lot less because it's really hard to justify. ... I'm going to get better or I'm going to change this place to for the class of 2026. I don't care about that, but to say I've got 11 kids down at the CFC that I'm teaching how to climb this year and there's going to be 11 to 15 more next year. ⁵⁴ That is a number that I can work with ... improve the quality of education for those people.
C2M5	I think you're going to see a lot of difference between how optimistic a kid is [based on] whether or not they believe they can make some sort of organizational change. Personally, I'm kind of pessimistic as to how much change you can [make] especially as a cadet. Even the most influential position as a wing king, ⁵⁵ you only get a semester to effect change. That usually, in my opinion, just gets switched right back when the next wing king or queen rolls around.

Table G26*How Person-Fit Values Alignment Affects Commitment to USAFA*

ID	Person-Fit Values Alignment
C2F3	It's kind of like a family ... just wanting everyone ... seeing everyone kind of help each other. ... The people just kind of help want to make me a better person.
C2F4	My biggest issue is with the honor system here. I understand that there are times when you really have to hold your people accountable and make sure they're doing the right thing. At the same time, encouraging snitching on your classmates for cheating on a test; I don't think that instills that trust and communication among your peers. I become cynical. ... I just don't trust anyone anymore.
C2M4	I want to make the Academy look [good]. ... I do a lot of escorting duties. ... I'm pretty bought into the success of the institution.
C3F2	I really do respect everything that it [USAFA] stands for. I respect its mission and I want to better this place.
C4F1	I just really like [that] everybody here is like-minded in one way or another. I've never been around so many people that think the same way that I do and being able to go to people that are here that know what's going on, that can relate to everything that's just been such a huge thing for me. ... The few [relationships] I have been able to make have been some of the strongest friendships I've ever had, and so that's been really, really nice; and just being around people that understand what you're doing, why you're doing it, because most people back home don't really get it.

⁵⁴ Cadet Fitness Center (CFC) where cadets are able to work out.

⁵⁵ The highest ranking cadet at USAFA is the Wing Commander, often referred to as wing king or wing queen.

Table G27*How Gender Affects Cadet Commitment to USAFA*

ID	Role of Gender in Cadet Commitment to USAFA
C1F1	I think females feel like they have to work harder to maintain the same level of respect that males do. And I don't think it's to any fault of organizational leadership or anything like that. I think it's the academy's STEM majors are predominantly male. Down at the airfield, predominantly male. Sometimes people feel like they have to work a little bit harder to cheat the same baseline level of respect. But I don't see a big variation in commitment personally.
C1M1	Guys in my experience tend to [have] a bigger range. You'll have the guys who are really motivated, and you'll have guys that are less motivated, don't really care too much here; whereas I think the girls are generally more motivated towards leadership positions and also doing better academically with an emphasis on the leadership.
C2F1	I can say my demographic of just being a female, it's a lot harder to be here ... freshman year in my squadron, I got sexist slurs thrown at me and I know quite a few of us did. I can only imagine having racist slurs thrown at me if I were black or if I were some other race, because I've heard the same stories of people of different race than me. [In] a lot of ways, I'm privileged to be white. But I think that the typical white male has a lot more confidence in this place than anybody else does, even as a female. Here, we are labeled cadets, spelled c-a-d-e-t-e-s. It's like we're somehow less than a normal cadet. It's written that way. We have a social media page [Jodel] and they spell cadets with an 'a-t-t-e-s.' I don't even know if it's harmful. I don't know if it's meant that way, but every time I read it, it seems weird that we would have to be separated that way.
C2F2	I'm a little biased here, but I feel generally women are a little bit more committed. That's also because we are the minority and I think sometimes a lot of the women here feel like they have to prove something ... but in some ways, we do have to prove something to their male counterparts. I think a lot of times that women have to prove something to their peers, male cadets, rather than permanent party male officers., but on the other side, sometimes female cadets have to prove themselves to the female officers. ... I think the girls are a little bit more motivated sometimes.
C2F4	I think it's a trend that the majority of females are more committed than males. I think that's more because to be a girl and want to go into the military, you got to have more commitment to do that versus a lot of guys who maybe their family tradition [is] to come to an Academy or that's more accepted, where for girls I think you got to really want it. I also notice that in upper leadership positions here ... we're like 20 to 30% of the cadet wing, [but] the majority of upper leadership positions are women.
C2M2	I might say females; it's either females or no difference. ... The females that I have seen, they've always just had a better attitude. Maybe that's just the females I surround myself with, but they always seem to have a better attitude than the guys.
C3F1	No [difference] in the sense of commitment. In the sense of effort they're willing to put in to achieve, it seems like females put a lot more. We're starting to see more and more females in leadership positions. I know with my working groups, it's female-led, we're doing all the initiatives, and it's kind of frustrating because the guys make it through anyway, but ... I don't have to do this. I don't have to put forth the extra effort. It's my choice, but I feel like maybe that is a trend that females feel ... a greater sense of responsibility, so they go for those positions.
C3F2	Women here are extremely competitive, and I think a lot of that stems from, we feel like we have to compete with all the dudes, but I feel like that's also kind of just the attitude of most women in a male-dominated career field. ... They will fight tooth and nail to get to where they want to be.

ID	Role of Gender in Cadet Commitment to USAFA
C3F4	There's obviously a lot fewer of us, and so I think we really show our dedication and our willingness to strengthen ourselves as leaders in character by coming here, because we could have just taken the easy way out and gone to ROTC, ⁵⁶ but to be honest, I would have to think about that probably a lot more to figure it out, like study it out to figure out whether there's a difference there.
C3M1	Women here feel like they have a lot more to prove. You definitely see a lot more effort ... but I don't think that means that the guys here are any less committed. I know there's been a few girls in my squad who have accused all the other guys here ... of not having to work as hard. ... The main takeaway is that girls seem to have more to prove.
C3M2	I've probably seen a few more females, actually a lot, more committed than some of the males. ... If I were to get into it... the fact that there's a lot less females here than there are males. ... I'd say that's probably where that drives from. ... I'm going to prove better than all the guys.
C3M3	Both males and females are very committed to the Academy, but probably females overall are more committed to the Academy, trying to do better, trying to push themselves.
C4F1	Women ... work a little bit harder to get here initially ... back in the day when they first started allowing women to enter the service academies. I kind of feel like in a way that legacy has continued because it's such a male-dominated environment that girls especially now ... if they want to compete with ... the boys that come here, there's obviously a lot more of them. They were top of the top when they were accepted, most of them. ... Among the girls, there is this common competitiveness with the boys to be just as good or better. I feel like because of that, the girls can sometimes be a little bit more focused and driven. ... I really have to kind of fight my way for it ... because we are outnumbered ... Sometimes the girls are just going to push a little bit harder so that they can get to that ... mutual respect.
C4F4	From what I've seen, I think females are a little bit more committed. It's not a drastic gap between males and females, but I think because the military is not the stereotypical job for a female, we kind of have to be more committed to developing ourselves.
C4M2	From what I've noticed, the girls are ... more committed than the guys, especially during basic. The girls in our squad at least were always on top of things, they were always putting out, always doing best. I much respect for the females in our squadron.

Table G28*How Graduating From USAFA Preparatory School Affects Cadet Commitment to USAFA*

ID	Role of USAFA Preparatory School in Cadet Commitment to USAFA
C1F3	When people go from [being] preppies, they have more privilege and work more with officers as opposed to [cadet] upper classmen. They come here, they are more jaded and are less committed to USAFA.
C1M1	I think the prep schools, they input enough kids every year that it's a really variable group. I've known some to be highly motivated throughout their time here and I've known some that just are here to play sports or just here because there's a way for me to become an officer and that's why I'm here, and I think both are valid ... just kind of individual choice.

⁵⁶ Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) is a program at many universities to prepare future become officers.

ID	Role of USAFA Preparatory School in Cadet Commitment to USAFA
C2F1	The demographic of the prep school: Race, gender ... we have a lot of sports players [at] the prep school, and they're maybe more focused on their sport. I think it is more of the demographic or more of the situation they're coming into, whether they're trying to be an athlete. I've seen more priors willing to leave than anything, and I think my boyfriend would agree with that [he's prior-enlisted]. I usually just see the athletes drop their sport, if anything, and stay here. I worry a little bit more and I don't even know the actual statistics if somebody of a different race drops out. I could just see there potentially being some discrimination here. I've heard stories of kids leaving because they were discriminated against and that's where the issue of race comes in. I think that they're just trying to get away from being discriminated against.
C2F4	Definitely less committed. A lot of prep schools are ICs. ... I think a lot of the prep will make better officers, are way more down to earth and get along with people.
C3F3	With the exception of a couple athletes. ... I think that they have a huge commitment to this place because they turn down direct offers from other universities or they left their career path to kind of start over here.
C3M3	Prior preppies are a little different because they know how the Air Force works. ... I think they can get pretty cynical and they kind of distance themselves from the Academy as a whole. I had a couple of friends my freshman year, prior-preppies, and a couple of them left. They just didn't like the culture that the Academy fostered because it's definitely very different. Prior-preppies and probably preppies in general, they kind of have their own culture. They kind of stick to themselves a little bit more. I would say ... in general [they] are more likely to be less committed.
C4F2	I have seen a few [preppies] that maybe their commitment has gone down because they have four more years. They're starting over. I think just that mindset, instead of having a good perspective on it, that they are more prepared. ... I think they get very cynical sometimes. But again, it's very personal. ... I've seen some preppies that are very committed and are very successful.
C4M2	I didn't notice a huge difference between priors and directs, with the exception of the ICs. Unfortunately, a lot of our ICs, this is just a generalization and I respect these guys in our squad, but I just don't see the same level of commitment in the ICs, even most directs who just ... came from college or high school.

Table G29*How Being USAF Prior Enlisted Affects Cadet Commitment to USAFA*

ID	Role of Prior Enlistment in Cadet Commitment to USAFA
C1F3	One of the most positive people I know is prior enlisted. He is so positive, good perspective. His life before was worse and he's thankful for the opportunities. If more took on that perspective, they would get more out of this place.
C1M2	That's tough because that's coming from a whole new perspective where these guys have been. They've been in the military. ... I roomed with a prior my sophomore year. ... I think he enjoys the Academy, but he's like, 'Please just let me out of here, I'm with a bunch of high schoolers right now hanging out with you guys.' I think they're just as committed, but they just bring a new perspective.
C1M5	I feel like from my enlisted time to now, I have regressed as an adult, because now I feel like I have to ask for certain things that normally I would have just been able to take an initiative to do when I was enlisted. I think that would definitely improve the buy in from cadets if they were to treat them a little bit more like adults [over] the progression of cadet careers.

ID	Role of Prior Enlistment in Cadet Commitment to USAFA
C2F1	My boyfriend's prior [enlisted] and the biggest thing that stands in their way is usually this place is so different than the operational Air Force, and all this extra work to do that doesn't exactly correlate to the real Air Force. So, a lot of them, they're not that committed to the institution itself.
C2M4	Priors ... probably a little bit less committed. I think a lot have this outside perspective so they can see [things] a little bit easier or some of the things we do here that don't make a lot of sense ... They've kind of got to buy into this whole system where especially Doolie year your entire life is regulated. I think it's definitely hard for them to really buy in.
C3F1	It seems like they feel they've already learned what they need to know by having active duty experience. So, they're not as open to ... courses like commissioning education ... which I feel reflects in their commitment because they feel like this place has less value to them. I feel like when they get here, it's like, 'This sucks, I'm back to basic training.' I had a responsibility ... I'm not even going to buy in anymore, but they're committed to the institution in the sense that they still want to graduate and commission.
C3F2	Priors are kind of all over the place, in my opinion. A lot of priors will say, 'This is so stupid, why are they doing this?' because they have operational experience, and they see some of the things we do, and they really question the legitimacy of why we're doing it.
C3M4	There's a big gap between how committed they are. ... Our DO is a prior preppy and he is super committed and he's awesome. ⁵⁷ ... Most of the people ... aren't committed to this place, they usually drop out. ... I know at least three or four prior preppies that came here coming from the prep school being enlisted and kind of just use it as an out to get out of their commitment. That's not the norm. But that is what I've noticed is either those that really don't care at all or they're all in and they love this place.
C4F1	Prior's commitment is definitely not as prominent as the majority. We have a couple of priors in our squad and I know that sometimes they just get so frustrated because they were operational for a couple of years. They know how the Air Force works, and then ... coming here they're being taught by people who, the vast majority, have never been in the operational Air Force. I know that for them at least, their frustrations are like, 'I know how this actually works, you've never actually been in it, why are you trying to teach me ...?' I've heard that the retention among priors is not great. I think that that's probably the biggest reason why is because they're 22–23-year-olds and they're being taught by a bunch of 19–20-year-olds who have never been operational before. I know for a lot of them that gets really frustrating because ... some of the methods that the Academy uses to teach, they don't really see how it necessarily applies directly. ... They feel that there's probably a much more direct way that some of that stuff could be taught. The four years that you're here, they've already kind of been through it.
C4F2	They have a better understanding of what is happening, especially when you go into the career field. I think they are more appreciative because they're going from being enlisted to coming here to this institution and becoming an officer. I think they have a better perspective on how much a difference there is between being enlisted and an officer.
C4F4	I don't see them as less committed, but I do notice some differences in how they perceive events going on. For example, during basic training, we do silly things like holding our contrails at 90 degrees in front of our face. ⁵⁸ And because I came from the high school, I had no prior experience with the military. My family is not military, so I had no idea what I was getting into. I just did what I was told. But whenever I talk to priors...they understood that this isn't what the military is like, whereas I didn't have that perspective. I think the different perspective on it.

⁵⁷ Director of Operations or DO is the second highest ranking position within a squadron.

⁵⁸ Contrails are the little books all basic cadets are given with the basic knowledge they are expected to learn.

Table G30*How Social Exchange Affects Commitment to USAFA*

ID	Social Exchange
C2F2	Why I've stayed, I've honestly met a lot of incredible people and the relationships I've made. How it's [my commitment] changed and why it's changed? It's just honestly been my exposure to really good people.
C2M3	What are the factors with making cadets pursue things and others do not? [It is often based on finding] the leadership that kind of matches that up [passions and opportunities]. I think ... you can find leadership that tries to understand what your goals are and tries to point you in that direction and say, 'If you're interested in that, you should check this out. You should do this. Let me set this opportunity up for you.' Or you can find leadership that says, 'You will do this. You will be interested in this,' and try to force you in that direction, and you're going to get a much less productive result from doing that ... mainly AOC, AMT, cadet leadership, but then potentially D.F. [professor] ... ⁵⁹ Within the CW training side of things, ⁶⁰ I think the biggest difference is that fear inspired discipline versus motivating you to actually understand why we do things and why you should want to do them.
C3F1	That's my sole experience where ... I felt disrespected, like they [permanent party] were mocking some of the things that I brought to their attention.
C3F2	The other thing was an incident with an upperclassman that I don't want to get into details with, but I really stopped trusting any sort of upperclassmen at that point ... because looking back there was pretty obvious signs that something had happened, and nobody really stopped to be like, 'What happened? Are you good?' In terms of commitment to this place, I had some really awful things happen my 4-degree year that I was like, 'Why am I here? Why do I bother?'
C3M1	Given all the training changes that happened last year that I'm sure you're aware of, it wasn't so much the changes that really bother me ... but the way a lot of ... my upperclassmen reacted really kind of gave me insight into the kind of leader that I want to be versus the leaders that I saw. I want to be a lot more composed than a lot of the leaders I've had here, because ... we had a training session that was obviously different from all of our other training sessions up to that point, and one of my upperclassmen was complaining and basically shouting, 'This is ridiculous. I can't believe they're having you guys do this,' and just complaining down the chain and not keeping a cool head ... It's competence, too; being corrected by upperclassmen who then I saw do the [same] wrong thing immediately after ... I never want to do anything like that ... do the wrong thing while I'm trying to tell someone else to do the right thing.

⁵⁹ Dean of the Faculty (DF) is the academic department at USAFA.

⁶⁰ The Cadet Wing (CW) is the organization in charge of the cadets at USAFA.

Table G31*How Social Influence Affects Commitment to USAFA*

ID	Social Influence
C1F2	I had a very hard time staying here. I went back and forth a lot. I tried to leave multiple times and a lot of it was my parents not really letting me. ... Parents and friends from back home, they don't really always know what is going on at the Academy. They don't really understand how it works, but I do think that would be a motivator because every position I carry, they think it's such a big deal.
C2F1	I think that peers have the greatest effect on my commitment, and I think that a lot of people might be able to say that. As a freshman in my baby squadron, I had some amazing leaders who I talked to today after they graduated. I also just had peers around me that were power hungry and just wanted to be in charge of someone and [not] really hold themselves accountable. The more I think about it, those great leaders, for instance, this past summer, my flight commander, when I was a flight NCO, ⁶¹ did everything she could to make me the kind of person I wanted to be. [She] would stay up after hours to teach me how to march cadets; would stay up after hours to tell me about her goal; pulled me aside if I did something wrong [and] explain that to me. This summer really solidified the decision to stay here for me because last semester I had some really poor peer leadership ... power hungry. They didn't really seem like they cared about anybody. They just wanted to be in charge. I think that definitely the peers have the greatest impact on people here. You're very, very lucky if you're in a good cadet squadron. ... I've had peers that wanted to leave USAFA based on how their squadrons handled their leadership. I don't really think that the Commandant [has] as much [influence] ... I don't think that a lot of us would leave specifically because of her decisions over us. I think the AOC does have a pretty big role in it, but not as much as the peers.
C2F2	I want to be my AOC when I grow up. She was awesome and just seeing how she was as a leader and how she was very much ... an empathetic leader, but she also didn't take any of our crap. She could tell that if we were just blowing smoke, she knew and she wouldn't take it. I thought that was incredible. But at the same time, if she knew that we were struggling and it was a genuine struggle, she could tell. I think she just really had ... good person-to-person skills. [Same with my AMT] she's awesome too, for the same reasons ... she would just really check on us a lot, check on her people and if she saw someone doing something really well, then she would ask them, 'Hey, how are you doing this really well?' If she saw someone struggling a lot, she would reach out to them and try to help them wherever she could. So that's the permanent party. It is my experience, which is great. I know [for] some people it's not great, and I think in a way that kind of fuels their pessimism. I've had some really great instructors, too ... I was accepted into the scholar's program, so my teachers [would say], 'You guys are really smart, you guys don't even worry about this.' We kind of got an extra boost in confidence a lot of time because we were told that were smart a lot. I don't know if a lot of cadets or the majority of cadets get that opportunity.
C3F1	[USAFA counselor] has done a great job, everyone has positive rapport with her. People could get lessons from her on how to be interactive with cadets and bring out the best in them.
C3F2	There was a little bit of exclusion. My class in my squad was pretty clicky, so the groups were very set in stone and I didn't really get a second chance coming out of basic because I really struggled.

⁶¹ Flight Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO) is a specific job for cadets at USAFA.

ID	Social Influence
C3F3	I don't know if this is the case when you were here, but there's a pretty large amount of cynicism about just about any decision that's made, and I'm ... kind of seeing that creep into my life [and it] has made me a little bit disenchanted ... it's made me notice some of the flaws or difficulties with this place.
C3M3	I think if they [permanent party] involved themselves a lot more with the cadets [it would foster commitment]. [Dean of Faculty] was great. Everybody loved him. He was always in the classrooms. ... I'd say if the permanent party ... would ingrain themselves more in the cadet population (e.g., in the library, in the dorms talking to kids, getting to know them), that just makes you intrinsically want to do better. I've read lots of good things about him [former Commandant]. I have a couple of friends who graduated in 2016, who were active cadets when he was Commandant because he was always with the cadets, and one of my friends who was a senior, he said he woke up just wanting to look your best and do your best so that you would make [former Commandant] proud.
C4F1	My coach this year ... she's awesome. Sometimes she'll just come and talk to me and we'll just kind of talk through the day and how everything's going. ... I've definitely figured out the type of leader that I want to be because there's good ones and there's bad ones. I absolutely, through this whole process have really seen what the good ones do and what the bad ones do and why you don't really want to be a bad one.
C4F2	For others that are feeling that disconnect, I think it can be a lot of [things] ... influences from home, whether they still talk to a lot of friends that are going to a normal college and getting that college experience. ... If you are talking to a lot of kids...[who] aren't doing a military duty at 7:15 at night, they're out partying, you know you're going to feel left out.
C4F4	Our AOCs and our AMTs, they're always there, they're always supporting us, they're always there to help and the people here are amazing.

Table G32

How COVID-19 and Associated USAFA Policy Affects Cadet Commitment to USAFA

ID	COVID-19
C2M3	I do think that we're ultimately here to graduate and to be better officers than if we were to direct commission, but it's kind of hard to tell at this point because we've almost been in a different Academy now with [the] change of command and COVID.
C3F3	The atmosphere right now is a lot different than it was last year because of COVID, so I don't really know how that like affects people's answers ... that is another huge factor, because I think there's a lot more cynicism now.
C3F4	[It's] tough with COVID.
C4M2	Cadet commitment to USAFA is down, partly due to COVID. ... Commitment is based on the hard experiences and the fun experiences. Right now, ... we are just sitting in our rooms doing school. ... So people aren't as committed as they could be because they have no ownership of this place. They aren't involved in anything. It's just all over teams [Microsoft Teams]. ... How can you feel committed to a certain place when your whole experience with it is just going to mitch every day?

Table G33*How Cynicism Affects Cadet Commitment to USAFA*

ID	Cynicism
C1F3	What I immediately think of is the culture around the Academy and the cynicism that isn't necessarily unwarranted, but it's very rampant. I saw that a lot as a freshman and sophomore, and it slowly started bogging me down. I'm thinking coming in, I was like, 'I got this; I'm going to take advantage of every opportunity I can. I am going to take everything seriously,' but when people in your own class start to [say], 'I don't care about that, that doesn't really matter,' you second guess. Then especially when upperclassmen tell you something doesn't matter; it really makes you second guess. It's really inspired me to not completely check out as an upperclassman, trying to lead the 4-degrees and be like, 'What you're doing is important and what you're doing is hard, especially since you haven't been able to go home. You might not be able to go home, but it doesn't mean you can let things slide.' There's a lot of things to think about in regard to their development and how they can view the Academy and trying to sort of stop the cynicism that you hear.
C1F4	I'm still committed to the Academy and what it was made to do. It definitely gets hard with the cynicism; I feel like Firstie year, you're just, you're tired, you're worn out.
C1M2	Cynicism ... the whole wing hates being here. Stepping outside of myself, looking at all four years, what I realized is everybody's going to complain, and everybody wants to complain because they want to be heard, but there's something stronger that's keeping them here.
C3F1	I hear cadets all the time joking, 'I'm not committed here,' but then they stay. I feel like it's just that cynicism. I'm just going to say this and it's going to make you feel better, but it really doesn't.
C3F3	When I came here, I kind of had an idea that it was this perfect place where everyone was like me and wanted to develop themselves to be the best person they could be... Last year especially, it kind of struck me that that is definitely not the case ... There's a pretty large amount of cynicism ... about any decision that's made ... kind of seeing that creep into my life has made me a little bit ... it's made me notice some of the flaws or difficulties with this place.
C4M1	There is a prior enlisted here ... he hates it here. He makes it obvious he wants to out-process. There is a running joke if you want to out-process, don't go to him because he will help you. His main reason ... [when] enlisted he worked with some missile system. He would do things every day he saw contributed to mission ... worked in tight knit group. ... Coming here was a culture shock.

Table G34*How Subcultures Affect Cadet Commitment to USAFA*

ID	Subcultures
C1F3	People who focus on academics aren't too likely to perpetuate that culture [cynicism and lack of effort]. People who focus on CW and military, ⁶² I think, are the least likely to focus on that culture and will actively speak out against it in the most respectful way. To a degree, some ICs

⁶² The Cadet Wing (CW) is one of the four mission elements at USAFA.

ID	Subcultures
	or people who have a LOS status through different clubs and aren't as attached to the [CW] culture on a day-by-day basis are more likely to get that going. ⁶³
C1F4	One of the big ones, [subcultures] IC cadets are not in squadron at all. One of our other Firsties, I never see him, except for maybe noon meal formation.
C2F1	I do think that mostly [if] you are thriving in your squadron and you have people looking out for you, you're OK.
C2F4	The Honor Guard are all people that want to be at USAFA and are really committed to it ... I think they do care about people and they care about this place. ... I think most sports teams are ... they're more about their sport and that's why they're there.
C3M1	T-Zo gap; ⁶⁴ ICs answer to AD before [CW]. ⁶⁵ If we are all cadets, we should all be cadets first and not a football player first, not a basketball player first. ... It seems like as a whole when we had a mandatory event of some sort, Lacrosse didn't have to go to it. We heard about that; it was just not cool. We're cadets first; this is mandatory, we all have to be there.

Table G35*Comments on How USAFA Workload Affects Cadet Commitment to USAFA*

ID	Workload
C1M3	I put it [my commitment] at five [on a 1-10 scale]. Coming [in I was] for sure a ten, fully committed to the Academy. I think it's just life here for me, but it's just changed over time to kind of beat me down.
C1M4	The way that the Academy is, it's meant to be a stressful place and the real world is stressful.
C2F4	It's still hard. I think that the grind of the Academy wears on everyone.
C2M5	Commitment to the organization. ... I don't think that's quite as high a priority, because the tendency here, especially when things get hard ... a lot of people, they get a lot on their plate and they go through their trials and tribulations and they just stick their head down and run, run with their head down and stick their nose to the grindstone I don't think that the commitment exists quite as much on the organizational level because the tendency to just be swamped and focus on getting what you need to get done for yourself is lot bigger of a push factor.
C2M3	The nature of this place is you really have to seek those opportunities out. Part of the problem with that is just the way that things are presented here, where if you have so much to do or you're really stuck with academics or you've got a lot of mandatory things in a given day and you have very little time and you ... submit this application to go do this really cool summer research project and then you say, 'I'm too busy today, I'll do that tomorrow,' and then all of a sudden before you know it, it's the day after you've missed the deadline. People get so stuck trying to keep their head above water on a given day that they're not able to plan out those opportunities or really present themselves in a good way and take the time to go out and do any of those things.
C4F1	Hindering commitment level. ... I feel like it's a lot of ... you've been here, you know, it's a stressful environment, kind of overwhelmed with things.

⁶³ Limited On Season (LOS) status allows cadets to be exempt from certain military duties.

⁶⁴ Terrazzo gap or t-zo gap is a term used for the gap between ICs and the rest of cadets.

⁶⁵ The Athletic Department (AD) is one of the four mission elements at USAFA.

Table G36*How the Communication Process Affects Cadet Commitment to USAFA*

ID	Communication Process
C1F2	Feedback is a very big thing and lately I feel there's a huge disconnect between cadets and permanent party. I think that's always been an issue that cadets raise, but I think with just sending things up, sending up concerned suggestions, that kind of thing, they get lost in the process or it does reach the Commandant ... but it's not exactly what they want to hear or it's not what their focus is [on] so they kind of throw it away, but I think feedback is something that can improve.
C1F3	Something happened today that made me think about this. [Commandant's Instagram post] it really received a lot of backlash on Academy fan pages, you are ignoring cadet problems yet posting about something as trivial as this; on 19 November, rather than Gettysburg Address or Apollo moon landing. Comments were being deleted, plenty of time to delete post, address comments; six hours later it is still up, it isn't being addressed. I don't think cadets are in the wrong for being upset. What will help commitment is being transparent, willing to admit, own, and talk about mistakes; something that seems so insensitive to cadets' problems in this current COVID environment. Transparency is very important. Here are all of the COAs for COVID versus [acting like] everything is all right or we don't want to tell you things to freak you out. ⁶⁶ It would foster a lot more commitment if they trusted us and communicated with us about what is going on. They don't talk to us and don't take us very seriously.
C1M2	I think hindering the commitment ... everybody wants the full picture of what's going on and how decisions are made, and that's super present right now ... when we're being told to move in the next [COVID] phase. It's limited with the amount of communication of the 'why', but why are we moving into these phases? I think something that's been really good from our chain of command this year is we've had direct emails from the Superintendent. We've had direct emails from [Commandant] that have told us why these decisions are being made and what's the end goal. I think those things increased commitment to the Academy, because now we have something to stand behind, something to encourage us, and something to look forward to because our leader is caring for us and they're being clear with what they're telling us. When that is taken away or when the leader is inconsistent with their direction it really leads to a lack of commitment.
C1M4	I would say being up front with cadets is obviously a big one. If a cadet hears, 'We know you have a lot going on. I know we need these mandatory briefings which you guys probably don't disagree with, but if you guys would take the time to actually listen, I think you guys could learn a lot,' you would at least get a couple more people bought in.
C2F3	I think what definitely hinders it [commitment] ... having all the cynicism, it's mostly because the permanent party ... that gap. I guess we don't see the big picture, we don't understand why permanent party does the things that they do. The big example is everybody just wants to go home because [of] this whole COVID thing, being in quarantine ... let's just go home. I don't know why they're doing this or having a football game on Thanksgiving. ... Why doesn't permanent party just go to the football games and be an optional football game? Every time I hear these complaints from my peers, it's like, I should have just gone to ROTC or something; I should have gone a different route.

⁶⁶ Courses of Action (COAs).

ID	Communication Process
C2M3	Decreasing trust is a huge one because I have noticed ... there's a demonstrated lack of trust in our direction. With COVID phases and our rules and regulations, and looking at what they are, it's apparent that they're written with the expectation that we're going to do more than that. The regulations we have are written with the expectation that people aren't going to follow them. ... When they look at the math and everything else [it plans for] two or three people. They're saying that for every one person getting sick, you're getting two or three people sick, which clearly is demonstrating they don't expect us to follow that rule of interacting with our roommate. It demonstrates to us that we are not trusted, which immediately erodes trust in leadership, and I think that's something that you can't force in one direction. It has to be mutual.
C3F3	We don't know who all is making these decisions, but I think that when there's that disconnect between what kids want or what kids think should happen and [what] the upper leadership says, 'No we're going to do it this way,' and then there isn't really any reasoning given. I think it's the lack of reasoning ... we don't know why these decisions are being made. That makes it difficult to connect more with the institution.
C3M1	Communication has been a big part of it [reduced commitment]. Feeling like I'm ... intentionally kept in the dark sometimes like during ROM ... during that time I always felt like they weren't telling us enough about cases in the wing. ⁶⁷ My brother's girlfriend came back to work basic ... and said two ambulances pulled up to Sijan Tower, ⁶⁸ which is where they're doing quarantine and isolation, and we haven't heard anything about it. They won't tell us if everyone's OK. We don't know what's going on. It just kind of feels like the administration here says, 'If they need to know, we'll tell them'. I feel like we should have a say in what we need to know. I'd like to know if someone's getting hurt over inside one tower, and I'd like to know how many cases we have in the wing.
C3M2	I feel like there's always been this really delicate, shaky relationship between permanent party and cadets. I think one of the big things that could probably ease that ... is whenever they make a decision that kind of inconveniences us ... [being] super transparent. ... I feel like permanent party in terms [at the] group and wing level, they're the ones making big decisions; we're going to put a football game on Thanksgiving; you don't have a Thanksgiving [break] ... it's weird the inconsistencies with COVID guidelines. That's a really big thing. You can't do this, this, and that, but we're still making you do combatives ... that's a big topic that everyone's just confused. [If there were] a bit more transparency ... provide feedback ... [without these things] gives us this notion we're not being heard. ... I feel like more transparency would probably do wonders in terms of the relationship between cadets and permanent party.
C3M4	The majority of the complaints that I've heard ... is a lack of transparency. There's a lot of decisions that get made here that we just have no idea why they're being made. For me, at least, if I know why decisions are being made, I can get on board with it. If I know why something's happening, it's a lot easier to say, OK, I see that reason. I may not agree with it, but at least I know why something's happening.
C4F1	All the changes that were being implemented this year, along with the precautions they had to take for COVID at the beginning of the year ... nobody really knew what was going on. Permanent party barely even knew [what] was going on. We're kind of the last people to find out. ... I just remember talking to my parents on the phone and just being really frustrated because nobody knew what was going on, we didn't know when certain things were going to start. None of the upperclassmen technically knew what they called it, like what they were allowed to do to us, that kind of stuff. ... How long is this going to last? There was just a bunch

⁶⁷ Restriction of Movement (ROM) was the term used for part of the COVID processes in place.

⁶⁸ Sijan Tower is one of the two dormitories where cadets live.

ID	Communication Process
	of unknowns that they were having to figure out as they appeared, and that was that was really frustrating.
C4F2	The biggest thing, and this is no one's fault, just because of the times, is communication.
C4F4	Things that knock it [commitment] down, it's completely situational. ... There are a couple decisions the Academy has [made], I kind of question. I'm not at the top. I don't have all the facts. But sometimes it's hard to trust everyone that's much higher up in the chain when it's hard to see where they're coming from and why they're making these decisions. Recently they just made mitches for lunch have ten people to a table. ... ⁶⁹ The only thing that separates the ten people at a table is plexiglass, when before ... only four people at a table easily six feet apart. They made the switch to the ten people at a table ... at the same time that they made breakfast and dinner take-out only. I understand that Plexiglas has been shown to decrease the spread of the virus in the past, but at the same time, you're putting us into a room with more people that we haven't mixed with before, more people at a table. I don't understand what their perspective on that was.
C4M1	A lack of transparency makes a lot of cadets cynical and feel like what they are doing is useless. ... Suddenly you will hear one thing, then another day you'll hear another thing, and it feels like you don't know what is going on, and you don't know why these decisions are being made.
C4M3	I would say that one of the things that really hinders commitment is just morale in general. Lately, morale seemed pretty low and I think that just stems from a lack of communication from leadership, because they'll make a decision and then we don't understand the why behind the decision. I feel like that just kind of brings a lot of people down. For example, the decision to put us all in phase five when all we're doing now is taking classes. A lot of people would say, 'Why don't you just send us home ...?' They haven't really told us why we're here at this point. A lot of things like that, they don't underline the why or what they're doing.
C4M4	There's some of us in the class that look at our leadership and go, 'What are you guys even doing?' I think sort of that communication aspect of understanding what our peers are doing. If you don't need it now, you don't need to know, and I think that that can be a problem for most people. They don't understand that.

Table G37*How Hierarchal Structure Affects Cadet Commitment to USAFA*

ID	Hierarchal Structure
C1M1	A lot of things that I'm really inspired by here and really make me prideful of being at this institution is when cadets are given the latitude to be like, 'Here's what we need done, you guys just got to get it done. Here are the guidelines. Do it.' ... Classmates ... they'll come up with the most creative ideas to solving the issue, and it's really pretty inspiring honestly.
C1M5	[Commitment would be fostered by] the institution giving cadets a little bit more responsibility, because what I've realized is when you treat people like their kids, they tend to act like kids. When you treat people like adults, they act like adults.
C2M2	Cadets never feel like they have any freedom. ... Comm's challenge a couple of weeks ago ... cadets are just handed a sheet of paper saying, ⁷⁰ 'Here's your activity, do it,' ... someone's telling them what to do. ... Think of some activity to do for the Comm's challenge and then the cadets ask you to think of some idea, then it's almost always a hit, and people say they take a lot

⁶⁹ Mitchell Hall or 'mitches' is where cadets eat their meals.

⁷⁰ Commandant's (Comm's) Challenge is a major training event for cadets.

ID	Hierarchal Structure
	away from it. One thing that hinders commitment to developing themselves and each other is feeling like they actually have some role, or some say in their development.
C3F2	I think there's a lot of things that leadership could do to be more in touch with reality and more cognizant of how they're using people as a resource and how they're using their time as a resource.
C3M3	The Academy is very structured and there's a lot of things that take up your time. That's good to a certain extent, but I also think you can give more leeway in giving cadets more creativity to make a program. ... I think [it's] key that cadets design their own things, that will definitely promote creativity ... would definitely reduce the cynicism ... and that commitment is going to increase.
C4M2	People aren't as committed as they could be because they have no ownership at this place.

Table G38*How Trust Affects Cadet Commitment to USAFA*

ID	Trust
C1M5	[The mission] is a lot of buzz words. If the Academy actually cares about character, I think it's going to be a lot of changes in the things we do as cadets or some of the processes that [we] would go through as cadets, that I don't think necessarily contribute to us meeting that goal.
C1F4	One of my friends who was on Wing [staff], they said it was like the worst. That's what's kept me from being ten, because I want to take these positions to improve myself, but then again, I'm afraid of what I might encounter in those positions.
C1M1	We kind of [have] an inconsistency in how we don't really develop leaders or how it's poorly done. There's a ton of examples of officers not taking responsibility here and upper leadership. ... They're always willing to be kind enough to give us relaxed sanctions on stuff (e.g., you don't have to do a SAMI this weekend) but it's generally our fault when things go wrong. At least that's the sense that comes off. I just think there's a lot of inconsistency.
C1M3	I watched a Simon Sinek [author] video and the way that you get people to buy into an organization is you gain their trust, and the way you do that is by showing that you care about them. The Academy says people are our utmost concern, people matter the most. It's people, then mission, but their actions aren't aligned with their word. I think that's been exposed much more lately because they've had to do a whole lot of changes and bring in a lot of new stuff with COVID. It's ... hypocritical for them to say that you matter, your health is important to us, and then they turn around and say, 'No, and the mission matters, so we're going to keep you here. We're going to make sure that you guys graduate,' things like that. I think it'd be better if they just said, 'Guys, we have a mission to do and that's the most important thing for us right now.' Instead of essentially just lying and saying, 'You guys matter the most.'
C2F2	How it's changed and why it's changed for my commitment level; it's honestly been my exposure to really good people. My trust in the Air Force being a good place, I want to invest my time. I've become more committed when I can trust that it's worth my time.
C2F4	I just don't trust anyone anymore. I will give you two perfect examples, especially with all the honor cases that have been happening, like cheating online over COVID. 700 cadets. ... I don't even know how they can justify some honor. My one friend. ... I genuinely think he'll be an amazing officer and he's really smart. ... He studied really hard for his chemistry final, didn't get outside help on it. He didn't cheat on his chemistry final, but then his friend who needed help with his chemistry final, called the person I'm talking about and asked for help, and because he was a good dude and he felt bad for him, he helps him ... on top of that snitched on him for helping him, and now he's out on a probation. He failed the class because it was the final. [They

ID	Trust
	say] just come forward if you've done it [violated the honor code], you're going to get leniency if you report yourself instead of getting caught, and my friend did that. He cheated and then he reported himself, and he's not getting anywhere. He's facing the exact same probation as any other person who cheated and got caught.
C3M1	I've kind of grown to trust the organization a little less, so my commitment to it has been a little less. ... I trust the big USAFA a little less, but I feel a lot closer to all the individual parts that make it up.

Table G39*How USAFA Curriculum Affects Cadet Commitment to USAFA*

ID	Curriculum
C1F1	The lead class that we all take could definitely be strengthened. I think it's on an upward trajectory. It's much better this semester than it's been in past years, but I think that's where we fall short. Education on leadership. ... We get a lot of good exposure to real world experiences, we get a lot of exposure to real world leadership examples, but it seems like sometimes the more foundational or conceptual stuff is kind of force -fed to us and isn't as effective as it could be. ... Then we had a project application ... but it felt like it was just coming straight from a book as opposed to more of an opportunity for development through application. ... If we could incorporate more of that, the education side into the actual experiences, it would be more fruitful.
C1F2	The lead course can improve, honestly. It's more like an actual class where it used to be like during M5 ..., you'd be like, 'I don't even know what we're talking about today,' but I think sometimes it's too forced. It needs to be more hands on, instead of writing a little sentence. CW is doing their own commissioning stuff and then you add DFBL that was really running the lead stuff and obviously wasn't well coordinated and integrated. ⁷¹
C1M1	One thing that's very, very solid and very in line with the mission is the honor portion of the Academy. We have had issues with honor recently; had a lot of honor cases over the summer due to being away from school, the hardships of not having in-person classes, but I'm getting a look as honor officer; the things we're doing for people who are on honor remediation and helping people out who may have made the mistake of cheating on some test. I think the remediation process is probably one of the best designed programs here and looking through it for some of my probates personally, I honestly wish I had kind of done the remediation process. I think it's a phenomenal experience to grow as a person. Lessons could almost entirely be replaced by just having an officer or officers come in and be like, 'The theme of the lesson is accountability, [tell] two stories about times where accountability was really important or something that I messed up or something that someone else did really well.' I think some things it does poorly. Commissioning education ... there's only a couple of lessons that are actually of any value. Most people forget everything they learned in those lessons in a week, let alone in four years when they graduate. There's a lot of wasted time there. Officership classes ... seems to be kind of inorganic. I understand the need for some academic level information, but I think overall, if you spent four years just giving experiences that the officers have in the military, it would be much more effective.

⁷¹ Dean of Faculty (DF) Behavioral Sciences and Leadership (BL) is one of the academic's departments at USAFA.

ID	Curriculum
C1M2	A lot of people complain that our lead class tends to be very dry and it doesn't really teach us everything that we want. ... If we're going to be officers and we're going to be in charge of people rather than just hanging out and being in charge of other freshmen, sophomores or juniors, why not go hang out with guys that are actually active duty, like our Security Forces here at the academy? We pass them at the gate and then that's all we do. Why not go hang out with the enlisted members that we're about to go lead?
C1M3	I think they go at it wrong, trying to teach leadership in a classroom. Leadership is done in the field and it's done by exposure. Giving a bunch of vocab terms and trying to teach them ... interpersonal relationships and buzz words and things like that doesn't really help. I think what helps more is training sessions.
C1M5	A lot of individuals realize that those classes just ... memorize what you need to memorize, take the quiz and be done with it. It doesn't really help us. The things that help us are going for positions, learning to be in difficult situations, and I don't see my class shying away from that.
C2F4	I think in some ways the other academies do that better just because they focus a lot more on the military aspect of their training. I have some friends at the other academies and it seems to be a consensus that the academics are much harder here but there's a lot less military training. ... I don't feel prepared. I'm a junior now. I should be taking on more responsibility and I don't feel even close to prepared to become an officer in the Air Force. I don't know if it's because we don't focus on the correct military training or I'm just not getting value from it, but the LEAD program has changed this year. I think it has the potential to be very beneficial. In the past ... M5 once a month and you talk about leadership and fill out this quiz or do a reading on it. It was kind of a joke. ... I understand academics are important because a lot of that we will be using in our careers, but also, I don't feel prepared to be an officer, and maybe that's just me and I'm incompetent.
C2M1	As far as how well we're doing, I think it's a very lofty aspiration and I don't think than ... every single person that graduates is a superb leader of character, but I think it definitely gives you the opportunity to improve yourself as a leader and improve your character and puts you in a lot of situations where there's opportunities for growth. There's a lot of commitment in general to becoming a better leader here. I think the issue is that in general, the military and the Academy doesn't have a concrete definition on what in particular will generate that outcome (e.g., leadership lessons, sports teams, military training). I think because people aren't exactly sure which of those things is the most impactful for them, that leads to differences in priorities across individuals. The most positive impacts, it's part of my experience this past summer, I've just did the CMC program, which is kind of a new thing where they're sending cadets to Higher Mountain College for three weeks of outdoor experience. I thought that was one of the most impactful experiences ... because it put you in an actual environment where failure had consequences. There wasn't unnecessary punishment if you did fail. If I didn't pack a food, I might be hungry ... that really epitomizes that this is a leadership laboratory. I think any opportunity along those lines, experiential learning, especially in the outdoors, is incredibly beneficial.
C2M2	I think it's right on. I think that's the point of this place and I think they do it. I would just say one thing I would add is a story about the statement itself, but I think that kind of just happens by itself. People think you need really specific training to develop leaders of character. Being here for three years has made me a better leader and it has made me more competent and more disciplined, and that would still be true if I never went to any M5 or any brief from some four-star general.
C2M4	We do a decent job, as good as we can, but I feel like the best way to teach the mission isn't necessarily in a classroom experience. [It's] more just what I do day-in and day-out, the challenges that face me and how I attack each challenge.

ID	Curriculum
C3F1	USAFA's mission presents its own challenge because it is not defined. We say we're developing leaders of character and we have conversations ... about what that looks like, but it's not defined. I couldn't give the right answer as to what that looks like or what they're looking for. ... The honor code, they're very clear about that ... that's tangible, I can recognize what your expectations are.
C3F2	One of the points that I alluded to earlier was there's too much to do in some respects, so people resort to 'good enough' and [it] is also subjective to the person.
C3F4	The current test we have to take ... at the beginning of the year for one of our leadership and development classes was probably the worst thing I've ever done. I understood the material and learned it. I understood the slides as I read through them. Then I got to the test and it was pretty much nothing like that. All of the answers were the same and it was very difficult to pick the answer. I was really lucky that I did as well as I did, but a lot of people did not. I think that hindered a lot of their desire to pay attention in these classes or to try because they knew either they were going to fail the test or they didn't care enough to try to learn the information.
C3M1	The mission itself, that's exactly what they should be focusing on ... implementation [needs to get] a little bit better. Character is probably the most important aspect of it. ... Classes like M5 and quizzes when it's like, 'Get this done ... take this quiz or else ...,' That transactional leadership on something so important towards commissioning just doesn't seem effective to me. I need to get through this as quick as I can so I can get on with the rest of my work. [I've had it] as a ten-lesson class this semester and I've actually gotten a lot more out of it than I did last year when it was an M5 once a month. ... It would be some random day and you'd go in for 40 minutes and learn basically nothing and try to forget it. You can move on with the rest of your academics. It would take up more time ... deep dive instead of just skimming the surface. ... Because right now ... it just doesn't feel like I'm getting anything out of that.
C3M3	There's a lot of good things in the process of developing leaders of character, but I think it could also be better. More [time is spent] than the other service academies on academics and maybe not a whole lot on the military side. Cadets could benefit a lot more from that. ... We've been focusing a lot since my freshman year ... learning resiliency. We have a lot of commissioning education, talking about resiliency. That's great to talk about, but I don't think you can teach resilience, I think it has to be learned. I think that there's a lot of ways we could teach that, or we can help the cadets learn that. ... There's an overemphasis on academics and an under emphasis on pragmatic application for officership.
C3M4	A lot of people took LEAD 300 and they also took this new course with their AMTs ... and pretty much it was the same stuff. ... The redundancies ... it seems it should be an easy fix. It's just a communication error between DF and CW.

Table G40*How Changes in Training Process Affects Cadet Commitment to USAFA*

ID	Changes in Training Process
C1F4	The main thing I hear from other people is the changing of training, because training has changed a ton. I don't know if this is a pattern across every four years that you see the lower classes do this or the upper classes do that. We've noticed that the lower classes, they're just lacking something. It may be from the change of training; they're lacking their commitment to bettering themselves. I remember freshman year I was terrified of doing anything wrong or stepping out of line. I would try to be the best, but then this year, I have noticed a lot of talk back or a lot of people washing out because they're just not committing to what we are doing.

ID	Changes in Training Process
C1M3	I think what helps more is training sessions. I actually really like where we're going, where we're moving away from just focusing on the four degrees and their development only, which was just beating them down day-in, day-out. We're moving ... everybody needs to develop because no one's ready. Everyone admits that they're all scared to go off and be second lieutenants in the Air Force. ... It's really nice to see that change. I just think there needs to be more of that and less of the classroom leadership.
C1M4	The way that the Academy is, it's meant to be a stressful place and the real world is stressful ... Basic is: how do you transition people from being civilians to being future military officers? ... As cadets we all talk about the waves and cycles between thinking physical training is super important to backing off some, and a lot of people right now say that we're in the low of being ... hard core or ... actual training. With this training it is trending more to ROTC style, minus the daily uniforms. I don't necessarily think it's a bad thing, although a lot of people do come here for that extra challenge. I personally hope that it swings back the other way in these upcoming years. ... Freshman year was the worst year of my life, but it has made me a better person ... super important to me. ... If you're put in a stressful situation ... it makes you think about how you're going to act, and you never know when you can be put in that situation. People make the argument that a lot of people have desk jobs, it doesn't matter, but you never know when we're going to go to war. That's not the point of being an Air Force officer, if you signed up just because you wanted a desk job then you should probably rethink why you joined, because we did join to be in the military. It plays into being a good Air Force officer with character, understanding how you react, and understanding how you handle situations under stress. ... These last two years, I kind of lost a little bit trust or commitment ... towards the Academy. Do I think people are still going to be good officers? Absolutely. I think that maybe they should relook into inducing those stressors because there's some correlation there ... but we're different for a reason. Not everyone does this ... we all volunteered for this; we're not forcing you to stay.
C2F1	The mission itself, it's a good thing to strive for. I'm not so certain we're actually meeting our goals here, especially this year. Beforehand, we were a lot tougher on cadets and I think you're going to find a lot of us upper class cadets ... push [that] training. I thought that built me into somebody who had strength and knew that I could do anything if I put my mind to it. I don't really hear that a lot in the upper classes, especially when I worked basic this past summer. I had cadets that were basics that were complaining about [how] they wanted better food. This institution, at least my class, has built a really gritty future. Officers who care about honor, who have learned it the hard way not to cheat and have integrity.
C2F4	A lot of the upper two think freshman year [is] kind of a joke because it's so easy, comparatively. I think you'll get very different [commitment] results from the upper two and the lower two.
C2M3	We're ultimately here to graduate and to be better officers than if we were to just direct commission, but it's kind of hard to tell at this point because we've almost been in a different Academy now with [the] change of command and COVID.
C2M4	Some of the changes we've seen over the past two years, especially the 4-degree training; I know personally, myself and a majority of my good friends ... that 4-degree training is so important to really nailing down these kinds of principles of: don't lie to folks, help everyone out ... really instilling that trust and teamwork. We've seen a lot of changes in how we've conducted a lot of the training. ... We're really doing a disservice to the younger classes in that we're not giving them that kind of experience. Is rough, it's not fun, I don't enjoy it, looking back ... it's the best way we can instill this sense of urgency without actually chucking you in a really awful situation. Looking back, that's what helped me the most ... 4-degree year. The lessons I learned there...that training really showed immediate effects, that now that I'm kind of in the leadership of my squadron, I see when that happens, there's not necessarily immediate

ID	Changes in Training Process
	effect, it might be like two months down the road. It [hurts] everybody because someone wasn't pulling their weight or somebody kind of fudged the number or didn't really tell the truth about this or that. You [hurt] your people in the long run, and I think that sort of training that we used to have really helped instill that in a very fast way, showed immediate consequences to doing something like that. I definitely know that some things have to change, but at the same time, I look back and go, 'I wish I could give those guys the same experience or a similar experience.' I see firsthand the effects it's had on me and how much it's helped me at the Academy and not just here, but in life and dealing with family things. I would feel a lot more receptive if it was a graduate telling me this isn't the right thing to do, but there's all of the graduates I know sitting there going, ... 'They're ruining the Academy,' and a little bit of that's warranted; a little bit of it isn't.
C3F4	Some of the things that have changed since I've been gone have caused me to be like, 'Maybe I don't care that much,' because it seems like a waste of time.
C3M1	Given all the training changes that happened last year that I'm sure you're aware of, it wasn't so much the changes that really bother me because I was kind of just along for the ride, but the way a lot of ... my upperclassmen reacted really kind of gave me insight into the kind of leader that I want to be versus the leaders that I saw.
C3M2	I feel like it's a pretty natural thing ... after your doolie [year], your commitment to the standards ... they definitely go down quite a bit. All the ... demands and restrictions that are placed on you for nine months and then all those restrictions are pretty much just taken away, you're pretty much a free person again. It's like that stereotypical kid who grew up in a really, really strict household and then goes to college and then just goes buck wild. ... Not necessarily a big drop, but there is a noticeable drop in commitment to this place. I already did all that nonsense 4-degree year. I don't need to worry about it now because you're out of the spotlight. [It] has shifted from you to the incoming class, and as you're getting away from that spotlight, you feel like your commitment [decreases]. I really appreciate how the Comm is moving towards four-class system instead of a fourth-class system.
C4F1	The changes they're trying to make right now is to fix some of that stuff ... to have a much better relationship with our upperclassmen. During basic especially, we learned a lot more ... of the military side of things rather than just going and getting beat down. We would spend hours a day practicing drill or talking about knowledge or really understanding the bigger why for everything. ... I feel that will help us in a way feel more levelheaded and not let our heads get so big once we're at that point, but some of the upperclassmen are like, ... 'I went through this; they need to go through this.'

Table G41

How the Selection and Evaluation Process Affects Cadet Commitment to USAFA

ID	Selection & Evaluation Process
C1F2	You start to see that a lot of the stuff here doesn't really matter. And in that way of commitment, sometimes I find myself not putting a lot of effort into the little things I can slide by in. I think that's a lack of commitment that actually increases [over time] you can get away with stuff and it doesn't matter. Let me focus my time on something else; commit myself to this aspect a lot more, put more effort into something else.
C1M2	(...) In actuality, before coming here. ... I [thought] the Academy was a diamond in the rough. And then when I came here to the Academy ... and I interacted with a lot of the people, I [thought] anyone could get in here.

ID	Selection & Evaluation Process
C1M3	I really like the idea of developing leaders of character as long as it's the right character virtue rather than vice. As far as the Academy adhering to their mission, there's some points where it's not going to work for everybody ... some of that's on the Academy, but also on the people that are brought in. Some people are just incapable of development and in the way that the Academy wants to see it. The whole honor code, 'Will not lie, steal, cheat, nor tolerate anyone who does,' we had a whole scandal when people were sent home last semester. A bunch of people got caught cheating on their final exams ... and a lot of them were Firsties. When you think ... these people are a year away from graduating, commissioning second lieutenants and they're cheating on a mech final ... their priorities are not straight. You have to question, either the people to not buy in to the program ... or the program at the Academy did not give them the tools that they needed to develop the right way.
C1M5	The curriculum could change in a lot of ways to help drive the Academy or drive cadets in the direction of [being] actual leaders of character. We've gotten to the point where we just want to focus on the three aspects of being an academy (physical, athletics, and military), the three separate points that we just have to do well and to get the graduation. I don't think a lot of cadets are really focusing on that [the mission] aspect anymore. I think the reason why is because the curriculum doesn't really push the overall goal that USAFA claims to be pursuing.
C2F2	The Academy does do a good job of creating leaders of character for the top 50% of the class, top 30% is even better. But the reason why I say that is because at the Academy, you have these positions you can apply for, but typically the same person or the same group of people get the highest positions, and it's not to say that everyone else that applies aren't going to be great leaders, but they're never given that same opportunity. I think that can be frustrating for some people, especially if you have two really great candidates, two great cadets, but they're in the same pool together, they're in the same group and they're both applying for the same job each semester. That one person who has that better GPA is going to get it every time. That's the one issue I have, because then the bottom 50%, they just assume, if I applied for that job, then this person's going to get it ... and frankly, they're not going to get it. In some ways it's like the drain, the swamp. That's how I think of it. Sometimes we need to drain the swamp. Even though I'm part of it, like I've been able to apply for jobs and I usually get the position. ... It's nice that I have been able to get these jobs. But at the same time, I know that there are some people that haven't been given these opportunities. One of my teammates who's in my grade, she hasn't really gotten any big jobs ... but she's probably a better leader than I am just based on how she's talked to some of our younger teammates and how she's really good at connecting people. She's never been given the opportunity to do that. It doesn't reflect on paper. ... The Academy tries to quantify a lot of qualitative traits that people have.
C2F4	[What] Cadets and people don't really talk about is that to get these upper leadership jobs that will develop your leadership skills, those jobs that are supposed to help you develop, you have to be competitive for those positions (e.g., cadet in good standing, good GPA). I'm very mediocre or below average ... everything is very mediocre. I feel I don't have a chance to even get those positions. I often don't even apply because I know I have no chance. I think that's a big thing. There's a huge gap. I notice a big divide between the two: good cadets get those upper leadership positions, and they can make change. But they often don't share the same views as the bottom half of the class.
C2M2	Almost every kid is committed to their development. I don't think that it is always noticed and appreciated because that passion for self-development isn't always the same with every kid. I definitely care more about grades than I care about my MPA, ⁷² and for a lot of people, that's

⁷² Military Performance Average (MPA) is the scoring evaluation for cadet's military performance.

ID	Selection & Evaluation Process
	more tangible because the grades [are] the biggest school thing we do here, but that person who's fighting for a wing commander spot, they're committed to practicing leadership and getting in a leadership position and making a difference. The ones that almost always go unrecognized is the football player who doesn't really care about grades as long as he's passing and doesn't really care about the same squadron leadership position but ask his fellow football players and every day he's putting in as much effort as you can to get better.
C2M4	I really like the mission statement. I think we do a good amount trying to make that happen. Our recruiting process is a little bit skewed away from that. We focus on some other externals that don't necessarily prove indicative of recruiting the right folks to where we are. I think we retain some folks we probably shouldn't retain because of athletic prowess or something.
C2M5	The things that we're doing that measure success are sought for their own end and we need to understand that they have to be inextricably intertwined with the mission statement, which is being a better person. ... Building virtue, increasing your character, being a more honorable cadet, has to be tied to all the little things that we do here, and I don't mean little things like making your bed. I mean, why should I get good grades? Why should I perform well down in the athletic fields? Why should I perform in my squad? How exactly does that make me a better person? Right now, the answer is you get better grades because it's good to have good grades or you perform physically because it's important to be physically fit. To continue seeking those things for their own end, it reaches a dead end every time.
C3F1	When it comes down to the day-to-day, people have other priorities and those are reinforced by the institutions in place where academics affects your OPA and because that relates to how you ... ⁷³ get a job. A lot of people put a lot of focus into that. They have to devote more time to achieve their own goals. Cadet's as a whole ... they wouldn't say it's not a priority, but they have priorities above it. It ends up getting left behind at times, especially as times get busy.
C3F3	In terms of developing leaders, it's a lot of discussions and then quizzes over those discussions ... but it can be really hard to measure your leadership capability in a multiple-choice quiz. I don't think that's necessarily a fair assessment of how good of a leader you are, but I think they're trying to do that. At least for me personally, the places where I've seen the most leadership development has been roles within the squad ... within your peer groups. Whether it's a class or an activity, down to the airfield, there's a ton of real-life leadership, especially with the officers that we have in terms of the character side.
C3M1	Some people seem like the most involved people, maybe Honor Guard or some of the higher-ranking people, ... seems they're always doing that [high ranking jobs], not because they actually care, but because it makes them look better or it kind of feeds their ego ... I can be a squadron commander ... the classic cadet who is ... a great leader, even though they're still doing it for their own selfish intent.
C3M4	A lot of cadets, they're pretty committed [as 4-degrees], and then after that, it really drops off just because there's no incentive to be committed.
C4M2	Service before self really needs to be emphasized. I just see so many big egos here and so many people who just want to get their free education and think they're ... the next big thing before they've even graduated. This harms the leader's potential. ... Service before self, we say that a lot during basic, but I don't think a lot of people think about it, and that's a different challenge to ... get people to think about it, but people just kind of take for granted that they're here.

⁷³ Overall Performance Average is cadets ranking among peers and made up of their Grade Point Average (GPA), Physical Education Average (PEA) and Military Performance Average (MPA).

Table G42*General Comments About Commitment*

ID	General Commitment Statements
C2F2	Everyone expresses commitment differently. And I think sometimes it's hard for me to tell if someone's really committed or not, especially because some people are just cynical. That's just their personality. I don't know if I can measure; I don't know if I can simply say they don't like this, this and this so they must not be that committed. It's hard for me to say, to be completely honest, but if I were to try to measure it, I think in some ways, people's motivation and work ethic can sometimes be a telling factor.
C3F1	It's difficult to tell when you don't know, when I don't converse with them [other cadets] on a regular basis. I hear cadets all the time joking, 'I'm not committed here.' But then they stay. I feel like it's just that cynicism.
C3F2	Commitment is rooted in trust and belief in values, espoused values lining up with actual lived experiences.
C3F3	It's kind of all over the place. Depending on if you're committed to your individual development. I think you'll be committed to the institution as a whole and vice versa.
C3M2	Eight or nine...I want to be 10 ... give me that wiggle room because of natural lulls.
C4F2	I am very committed to the academy because in order to be committed to myself, I have to be committed to the place where I am and it's going to develop me. I'm taking measures to develop myself, but I'm also in an environment that is designed to help me develop. If I'm not committed to that, I can only go so far as an individual.

Table G43*Concerns Related to Measuring Cadet Commitment Levels*

ID	Commitment to USAFA Measurement Concerns
C1F2	I wouldn't say academically commitment increases. I think people in that area [cadets] may be just trying to slide by. 'This doesn't matter, I'm just trying to graduate. I'm going to graduate as long as I don't fail this class.' People tend to try not to get in trouble as much and stay a little safer, play by the rules a lot more Firstie year because you are so close to graduating. I think it increases almost with your commitment to the standards and the rules here just because you're trying to do the best that you can.
C1M2	I would say coming in here my commitment to the military in general [was] almost max; I want to be here, I can't wait. Now over the three and a half [years] I've been in ... the Air Force Academy is different from active duty, even though we try to relate those two. I would say my commitment to the institution has just been broadened. Other than saying it's less or more, I think it's just there's a bigger scope. When I came into the Academy as a freshman, I was focused on 'I want to be a pilot, I want to be in the military, I'm going to lead people.' I didn't have a good idea of what that really meant ... Now, here at the Academy we go through a lot of classes that talk to us about the military. We have our AOCs, we have our AMTs that develop that idea of what the military is. But then more we're making those decisions on our own, we're making those decisions of what do I want to go into. ... So, I think that just for me, just broadens the scope. The commitment, I think it's almost at the same level, it's still max, but it feels like it's less because it's almost max on a lot of different areas.
C2F1	I wouldn't say that the cadets are committed as much to the Academy as they are to the people and they're committed to their futures and the way they're going to serve when they're joining

ID	Commitment to USAFA Measurement Concerns
	the operational Air Force. I know that there are some people here that love the Academy more than anything. There's definitely a small group of people who are very committed to this school, the institution itself ... but at least for people like me and a lot of the people that I associate myself with, their people, their leaders, and I know they're going to be great leaders and they have integrity, but it's more that hope that they're going to be able to be the same kind of leaders in the future and make sure that they can guide the people under them to be the best person that they can be.
C2M1	I think commitment becomes very directional, very much like a particular vector that individuals go down in terms of ... they may be very committed to their kind of tribe ... whether that be a club or a team or a major or something of that nature. Overall...may have a more negative attitude towards the Academy in general as a result ... Their own development and commitment to the Academy may not necessarily equal their commitment [to] the specific military aspects of the academy and 4- degree training things of that nature. ... Maybe they are [an] astronomical engineering major and they want to serve in the Space Force, and they were just in that space operations program, things like that. They're all very invested, all of that. That may not translate to some of the other aspects of cadet life, but ultimately, they still are serving that ultimate mission of getting themselves to be an officer in the military. ... A lot of my peers are interested in the special operations career fields ... and they spend a ton of time working out physically and the mental aspects of that, and sometimes that can lead to them being frustrated when they have to go to an M5 or go to noon formation when they feel like they could spend that time better preparing themselves or in the water.
C2M2	I think the commitment to the organization has changed. ... It's harder to say. I think it's hard, hard for me to think of the reasons why I'm committed to the Academy as an institution except I can't see myself anywhere else. I don't think that's related to this question, but I wouldn't say I think of myself as committed to the institution as much as...you could say that I'm committed to the mission of the institution. ... It's kind of weird for me to think about being committed to the institution.
C3M1	My commitment has been a little less [over time], but I'm more committed to subsets. I'm on the club hockey team...my teammates, I've grown really close to them and gotten a lot more committed [to them].
C4F2	I feel [cadets are] very committed ... maybe not to the military aspect ... athletes they're still very committed to the Academy itself because that's where they're playing with their team and their sport. [In an] almost different way than how maybe 4-degrees that aren't recruited here, who are committed more so to the military aspect into the life that the military is going to provide or [what] the academics can provide after. Either way, I feel all around all the students are committed to the Academy because ... [it's] providing for them.

Table G44

Statements on USAFA's Mission – Developing Officers of Character Ready to Lead

ID	Importance of USAFA Mission
C4M4	I think it's a good mission. ... It's a pretty generic mission. ... It's one of the goals that everyone has, everyone wants, especially at a place like this where you know what you're getting into. The point is, you know that this is a goal.
C4F4	I think it's a great mission because...after four years we are becoming officers and we are going to be leaders in our Air Force. So, throughout these four years, if they can develop us into leaders, but not only leaders, but leaders with honesty and trust and everything that goes into character ... it's a huge benefit.

ID	Importance of USAFA Mission
C4F1	I think that the mission as a whole is super important...we're developing people to go out into society...and uphold the moral standards. It really ... sets a standard for where the military should be, especially ... officers, we're going to be commissioned ... leading large groups of people. You need to be a morally upstanding person. ... We want to be people that the rest of the world can look up to.
C3M4	[The mission] makes a lot of sense to me. That's kind of what we want to do ... want to be developing leaders of character because that's important...we're going to be making life changing decisions. I want to know that the people next to me are going to be solid in their roots and solid in their foundations. So, the leaders of character, it kind of gives us that common background.
C3M3	I think it's a great mission. Obviously, it's very important for the nation, national defense and everything. ... There's a lot of good things in the process of developing leaders of character, but I think it could also be better.
C3M2	On paper, I definitely agree with it; definitely developing leaders, leaders of characters. Something I feel that the Air Force wants and ... officer corps from any branch wants of their officers.
C3M1	The mission itself; I think that's exactly what they should be focusing on ... implementation [needs to get] a little bit better. Character is probably the most important aspect of it.
C3F2	I definitely think that being a leader of character is important and it's definitely a good mission to have.
C3F1	I'd like if it was [better] defined. I think that is a good virtue to have because trust is essential given the nature of our careers. [Cadets] want to be a leader of character because they recognize. ... It's a positive attribute to have.
C2M1	It's a very broad goal and ... very difficult to achieve, a high aspiration.
C1M5	I think that the idea behind it is awesome.
C1M3	I really like the idea of developing leaders of character as long as it's the right character virtue rather than vice.
C1M1	At face value, I think the mission is very solid. And I think, in general, most cadets are pretty bought into that idea, that they want to become people and leaders of character because it's only going to help you. It's kind of a win-win.



DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE
HEADQUARTERS UNITED STATES AIR FORCE ACADEMY

2 April 2020

MEMORANDUM FOR Lt Col Justin Pendry

FROM: HQ USAFA/A9O (USAFA IRB)

SUBJECT: IRB approval to amend a protocol for research involving human subjects

1. Protocol title: USAFA Commitment Survey
2. Protocol number: FAC20200013E
3. Risk: Minimal
4. Amendment Approval date: 29 March 2020
5. Protocol Approval date: 2 February 2020
6. Protocol Expiration date: N/A
7. Date next continuing/final report is due: No continuing review reports are required; however, the study has an administrative expiration date of three (3) years after the original approval date of the study.
8. Amendment number: 1
9. Type of review: Amendment Approval
 - Full Board
 - Expedited under category 32 CFR 219.110 (b) (2)
10. Assurance Number and Expiration Date: DoD Assurance 50046, expiration 3 July 2020
11. Number of Approved Subjects: Approximately 4200
12. Training Expiration Dates: Pendry: 12 January 2021
13. Purpose of the Amendment: Add 11 additional questions to survey, including questions on personal values, relationship with AOC, and intercollegiate athlete status.
14. The above protocol amendment has been reviewed and approved by the IRB Vice-chair. All requirements, as set by the IRB and its legal counsel, have been fully complied with. Please note that the USAFA Authorized Institutional Official, HQ USAFA/CV, and the Surgeon General's Research Oversight & Compliance Division, AFMSA/SGE-C review all USAFA IRB actions and may identify additional requirements. This amendment does not affect the exempt status.

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15. Any adverse reactions or issues resulting from this study should be reported immediately to the IRB Chair or Administrator. All inquiries and correspondence concerning this protocol should include the protocol number (FAC20200013E) and name of the primary investigator. Please note that any reminders reference upcoming expiration dates are a courtesy and it is the investigators' responsibility to keep track of their expiration dates and submit their documents to the IRB on time.

16. Per DoDI3216.02_AFI40-402, Enclosure 2, 11.f., you must retain all research records (e.g., protocol, signed informed consent documents, IRB correspondence, and data) for at least three (3) years after the research ends or for the length of time specified in applicable regulations, or institutional or sponsor requirements, whichever is longer. You must transfer research records to another PI or keep them with you and provide new contact information if you leave USAFA before the three (3) years is over. In either case, you must inform the HRPP office that you are leaving USAFA.

17. If you have any questions or if I can be of further assistance, please don't hesitate to contact me at 333-6593 or the IRB Chair, Dr. Silz-Carson at 333-2597.

ELIZABETH GARCIA
HQ USAFA IRB Administrator