

LEARNING TO LEAD

NEW POSSIBILITIES FOR CADET LEADERSHIP EDUCATION IN CAP

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PREFACE

Cadets consistently report that one of their major motivations for participating in the CAP Cadet Program is to develop leadership skills. They take their leadership development seriously and want to emulate the professionalism of Air Force officers. Therefore, the quality of the cadets' leadership curriculum is an important factor in the cadets' overall satisfaction with CAP.

This paper discusses new possibilities for the cadets' leadership education. In short, it advocates for a new textbook, activity guide, multimedia modules, and other materials to help adults serving at the squadron level develop leadership skills in cadets. It also advocates a group-study approach and other changes to how CAP delivers the curriculum.

In part one of this paper, I provide a snapshot of CAP's cadet leadership education program, as it stands today. Through that discussion, we will naturally uncover the criteria that I believe any leadership education program must meet if CAP is to fulfill its stated goal of "developing in cadets the ability to think independently and lead others in an atmosphere of teamwork and mutual respect."¹ Building on that discussion, in part two I describe a new path for cadet leadership education in CAP. I conclude with part three, where I explain what the Cadet Program team at CAP National Headquarters will do to achieve the goal set forth in the cadet regulation.

This paper is not intended as the final word on cadet leadership education, but rather I hope it will be a starting point for a discussion about a new cadet leadership curriculum. As always, the cadet team at CAP National Headquarters will work closely with key CAP volunteers, CAP-USAF partners, and our friends on Air University's academic circle.

¹ See CAP Regulation 52-16, *Cadet Program Management*, paragraph 1-2a

Part 1

HOW CADETS LEARN LEADERSHIP TODAY

How do we teach cadets to lead and develop good leadership skills today?

This section considers the current leadership curriculum, and in the course of that discussion, begins to identify what cadets need from CAP if they are to develop good leadership skills.

INADEQUACIES OF THE CURRENT CURRICULUM

Currently, CAP does not offer much in curriculum products to help cadets study leadership. Their textbook, *Leadership for the 21st Century*, (previously known as *Leadership: 2000 and Beyond*,) dates from 1993, and is not supplemented by a student study guide, an instructor's guide, or activity book.

The lack of an instructor's guide is especially problematic because very few CAP adult volunteers consider themselves subject-matter experts in leadership or have prior experience in teaching. CAP does not provide adult leaders with lesson plans or discussion questions to help them help cadets understand the material. This shortcoming results in leadership education being very uneven from squadron to squadron, with the majority of class time being devoted to makeshift lectures, if formal instruction is provided at all. The moms and dads who are drafted into service as squadron commanders and leadership officers are right to feel overwhelmed and unprepared.

Even if an instructor's guide or activity book were provided, most squadrons would find those tools difficult to use because the leadership curriculum is self-study and not conducive to group activities. More specifically, the current curriculum has cadets advance through their text in sequence (chapter 1, chapter 2, chapter 3 . . .) at their own pace, which means that at the squadron level it is very common to have cadets working on different chapters at different times, making it virtually impossible for leaders to provide each cadet with the right instruction at the right moment.

INADEQUACIES OF THE CURRENT TEXTBOOK

Some textbooks can stand on their own, without need for supplemental materials. But *Leadership for the 21st Century* is not a particularly strong text.

Key concepts are not clearly defined. For example, the text refers to the concept of *discipline*, but does not offer a definition. It is easy to imagine a 13-year old cadet guessing that discipline means, "to punish," and that if a leader wants to promote discipline, the best approach is to frequently punish their subordinates. They do not learn that *discipline* originates in the word *disciple*, meaning one who follows and listens to their teacher, or that discipline

involves sacrificing short-term temptations as one works toward a long-term goal. The current text is full of examples of missed opportunities like this.

Sometimes the text defines abstract terms, yet continues to feed cadets a simplified definition even as their experiences grow. As cadets become ready for deeper study, the text leaves them wanting. For example, the concepts of loyalty and integrity are introduced simplistically several times in the text. Bright cadets are quickly bored with such an approach. Other cadets develop a false confidence, thinking they know more than they do simply because they have memorized an over-simplified definition. Instead, the text should enlarge the cadets' understanding of leadership concepts as they advance through the Cadet Program, ratcheting-up the level of learning each time.

But the text is not always ambiguous; sometimes it is definitive when it should be nuanced. In discussing public speaking for example, the text instructs cadets to be logical, reasoned, and unemotional. Certainly that is one way to communicate. But Dr. King's "I have a dream" speech annihilates the claim that an impassioned speech will fail. Cadets need a text that helps them see multiple ways of approaching a leadership challenge.

But even the most learned text will be of no use if cadets do not connect with it. For a leadership curriculum to command cadets' attention, it must convince them that its subject matter is relevant. This is not to say the text must be academically "soft." A good text can challenge cadets academically by drawing from psychology, philosophy, management, history, literature, and other disciplines framing leadership as a subject. But when presenting something young adults will deem esoteric jargon, it is vital for the text to explain why that knowledge is important, or better yet, how real leaders apply that knowledge in real life.

For example, the current text identifies the "ABCDs" of leadership (abilities, behaviors, characteristics, and dynamics). It does not explain what those terms mean, how they relate to one another, or why they are important. This example shows that not all content advances learning.

As another example, the text tries some heavy lifting in linguistics by mentioning the "fact-word relationship" and "two-valued terms." Linguistics has much to offer in the study of leadership, but it is easy to imagine cadets rolling their eyes at such jargon. Cadets will respect a challenging text, but only if they believe its challenges are worth their attention.

Part 2

A NEW PATH FOR CADET LEADERSHIP EDUCATION

It is clear that today's cadet leadership curriculum is inadequate. But not only is a new text needed, other supplemental materials are also necessary, and the overall self-study approach should be re-evaluated if CAP hopes to overcome the inadequacies of the current curriculum described above.

A CURRICULUM THAT GROWS WITH THE CADET

The Cadet Program is organized around sixteen achievements that are distributed across four phases, with each achievement being completed in sequence. Another key facet of the program is its military-style rank structure, which is also hierarchical and sequential. How should the achievement and rank system affect the design of the curriculum?

As cadets progress through the ranks, their responsibilities increase. A new cadet begins merely by learning to accept personal responsibility. Advanced cadets are assigned complex tasks, such as leading 100 cadets at a summer encampment. Therefore, cadets need a curriculum whose subject matter gradually increases in scope, complexity, and the level of learning. In a broad sense, the curriculum should progress along these lines²:

Phase I - Followership. The first step in becoming a leader is learning how to be a good follower who puts the team's needs ahead of one's own. Key topics in this module would include: personal responsibility, active listening, teamwork, and drill and military courtesy.

Phase II - Small Team Leadership. During this phase, cadets assume entry-level leadership roles in their squadron, with responsibility for coaching and supervising small groups of new cadets. Key topics in this module would include: an introduction to basic leadership theories, mentoring, informal public speaking, motivation and discipline, and the role of the cadet NCO.

Phase III - Indirect Leadership. As cadet officers, Phase III cadets command teams and learn to lead other leaders. Key topics in this module would include: officership, delegation, situational leadership, goal-setting, group dynamics, public speaking, writing, and counseling.

Phase IV - Strategic Perspectives. Phase IV cadets continue to lead by working through other leaders and serve in command positions at the highest levels of the cadet corps. Key topics in this module would include: articulating a vision and mission, setting long-term goals for the unit, delegation, models for strategic thinking, transformational leadership, critical and creative thinking, and advanced topics in communications.

² This broad outline follows the leadership goals set for each phase, as identified in CAP Regulation 52-16, *Cadet Program Management*, chapter 2.

Leadership Expectations in the CIVIL AIR PATROL CADET PROGRAM

	PHASE I The Learning Phase	PHASE II The Leadership Phase	PHASE III The Command Phase	PHASE IV The Executive Phase
ATTITUDE	Displays a positive attitude; optimistic; enthusiastic; is team-orientated	Maintains a positive attitude and encourages good attitudes in others; does not flaunt rank or authority	Conscious of own performance; takes initiative to develop new skills; self-motivated and able to motivate others	Resilient; shows mental discipline in working to achieve long-term goals; welcoming of change; has habit of continual self-improvement
CORE VALUES	Aware of the Core Values; honest; wears uniform properly; practices customs and courtesies	Displays a commitment to the Core Values; promotes team spirit, professionalism, and good sportsmanship as a team leader	Fair, just, and consistent in dealing with subordinates; exercises good judgment in knowing which matters should be referred up the chain	Uses empathy; recognizes how core values relate to new and unfamiliar situations; makes sound and timely decisions independently
COMMUNICATION SKILLS	Listens actively; attentive; asks good questions	Proficient in informal public speaking (ie: in giving directions to and training junior cadets)	Writes and speaks clearly; presents ideas logically; wins through persuasion	Articulate; succinct; persuasive; varies message to fit audience; proficient in explaining complex issues
SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY	Follows directions; dependable; arrives ready to learn and serve; effective in managing own time	Enforces standards; trustworthy in supervising a small team and leading them in fulfillment of a series of simple tasks; given a plan, is able to carry it out	Given an assignment, takes project from beginning to end; develops appropriate goals, plans, standards, and follows through in execution; demonstrates sense of ownership in all assignments	Completes large projects with little supervision; follows and sets a command intent; self-starter
INTER-PERSONAL SKILLS		Guides and coaches junior cadets; recognizes when junior cadets need help; leads by example; is not a "boss"	Actively mentors NCOs; resolves conflicts fairly; criticizes constructively; dissents respectfully when disagreeing with superiors	Actively develops and mentors cadet officers; adapts leadership style to fit situation; calm under pressure
CRITICAL THINKING			Thinks in advance and plans ahead to meet the unit's short-term needs; imaginative and not tied to old ideas	Sets long-term goals for the unit; imaginative and visionary; recognizes unit's long-term needs; mentally agile when faced with unfamiliar problems
DELEGATION SKILLS			Delegates routine tasks effectively and works through NCOs; keeps people informed; makes expectations clear; supervises work of other leaders	Directs multiple teams and manages multiple tasks; assigns people to right jobs; delegates well and enables others to take charge
PROGRESSION OF CADET GRADES				
TYPICAL DUTIES FOR PHASE I & II CADETS				
TYPICAL DUTIES FOR PHASE III & IV CADETS				

CAP recently laid a foundation for a leadership curriculum that follows such an outline. The cadet regulation identifies progressively increasing goals for the leadership element in each of the four phases. A “Leadership Expectations” chart³ shows how a cadet’s grade, leadership skill, and duty assignment should be connected within the curriculum. What is missing are the textbooks, instructor guides, and other supporting materials to enable cadets to fulfill the educational goals and attain the skills outlined above.

³ *Leadership Expectations in the Civil Air Patrol Cadet Program*. From CAP Regulation 52-16, chapter 2.

A TEXT TO MEET CADETS' NEEDS

What sort of leadership text do cadets need? Consider the list below as a partial outline of requirements:

- Clearly-defined objectives at an appropriate level of learning
- Age-appropriate vocabulary that errs on the side of being a bit more challenging than necessary, rather than being too juvenile

- A series of four modules, one per phase, with each focusing on different levels of leadership (followership, small groups, indirect leadership, and strategic perspectives)
- A text that allows group study, enabling cadets to complete chapters in any order, within their phase, so that cadets of different grades may study the same chapter together, and the squadron may offer leadership activities that relate to that chapter's subject matter
- Sidebars or mini-articles that explain how the abstract concepts discussed in the body of the text apply in real life
- Supplemental readings that augment the main points of each chapter – this is especially important for school programs who meet more frequently than traditional squadrons, have more contact hours, and therefore require more content
- Exposure to the classics of Air Force leadership, business leadership, history, literature, film, and pop culture (but placing special emphasis on Air Force leadership perspectives), thereby giving cadets a leg-up should they enter the military or study management in college
- Call-out boxes or pull quotes to amplify key points of the main text
- Typography and images that create a positive impression with young people; a design that respects cadets for taking CAP seriously and communicates a high standard of professionalism

AN ACTIVITY BOOK FOR HANDS-ON LEARNING

Hands-on learning is a great way to develop leadership skills. Some requirements for an activity book supplementing the basic text include:

- Hands-on, experiential learning opportunities, similar to the Team Leadership Problems used at Cadet Officer School – an “AEX” for the leadership element
- Case studies, games, movies, and puzzles that test cadets' ability to solve problems and communicate in a team environment
- Recipe-like lesson plans that identify the objective of each activity, explain how to execute the activity, and outline the main teaching points

The basic idea here is to engage cadets in a hands-on project that amplifies the concepts presented in the textbook. An activity might begin with a 5-minute review of the concept, followed by a 30-minute execution phase, and

conclude with a short debrief where cadets consider how the textbook's concepts apply in the real world, as experienced in the activity.

Activities can be constructed such that all cadets participate in the basic activity, yet follow-up questions could be crafted to meet the needs of new and advanced cadets alike. This approach has been successful with the moral leadership program's case studies and "solo pilot," "pilot," and "test pilot" questions.

Hands-on activities will not only make the subject matter more interesting and memorable to the cadets, it will increase opportunities for ranking cadets to serve as instructors, briefers, debriefers, mentors, and evaluators. The leadership curriculum becomes more structured, but does not prevent the cadet staff from taking charge of junior cadets and running much of the Cadet Program, as they do now.

PODCASTING & WEBCASTING TO REACH TODAY'S CADETS

A podcast is a short video distributed over the web. A webcast is similar, except it is a live video distributed over the web, often including a chat feature allowing participants to converse in real-time. They can be produced quickly and inexpensively, and are becoming hugely popular. Podcasting and webcasting gives CAP an opportunity to communicate with cadets in a fun medium. Some possibilities in this arena include:

- Interviews with people whose leadership perspectives will be respected by cadets – the "Air Force captain on-the-street" affirms that "integrity first" is not simply a buzzword and that Air Force officers take the Core Values seriously
- Roundtable discussions with Air Force leaders, cadets, and others, where they explain how they see abstract leadership concepts play-out in real life
- Interviews with leaders to discuss current events related to the leadership arena, further demonstrating the relevancy of the text's teachings

Cadets yearn for good role models and want to emphasize their Air Force affiliation whenever possible. Podcasting and webcasting meets this need by offering cadets yet another opportunity to interact with Air Force leaders. Moreover, podcasts and webcasts will keep cadets coming back to the CAP website, boosting their enthusiasm for leadership education. As the podcasting program takes off, it is easy to imagine cadets following suit, as they interview leaders and produce their own podcasts, which can easily be shared via sites like You Tube.

AN INNOVATIVE APPROACH TO ASSESSMENT

The purpose of an assessment program is to ensure students are fulfilling the course's learning objectives, and to determine what areas (if any) they need help with. Currently, the cadet leadership program uses standardized, closed-book, multiple-choice achievement tests written at the *knowledge level*.⁴ These tests are basically simple quizzes asking cadets to define, identify, or name basic leadership terms.

Many leaders of cadets are sensitive about the integrity of the current testing program. They want to keep standards high. They grow concerned when a very young cadet is promoted to a high rank because they doubt that an early adolescent will have the maturity necessary for serving in the leadership roles that are reserved for high-ranking cadet officers. There is much truth in this line of thought. How can we ensure cadets fulfill their learning objectives and develop an ability to apply leadership skills to real-world problems?

Again, we should return to the Leadership Expectations chart (see page 5 above), which outlines the behaviors we want to see in cadets. The chart becomes an assessment tool, a form of a test that is written at the *application level*. Leaders who are concerned about immature cadets advancing too quickly in the Cadet Program should find the Leadership Expectations chart a great tool for mentoring cadets and focusing them on how they apply leadership skills, not just their academic knowledge.

What then of our written tests? They are still useful because to apply learning in the real world, one must first know some basic concepts and understand how those concepts relate to other concepts. There remains a need for a written test on the textbook's subject matter. But again, the current tests are written only at the knowledge level – the lowest rung of the ladder in the cognitive taxonomy. Although some may find it hard to believe at first, CAP would be raising standards if it implemented an open-book test that was written at the comprehension level – a test that ensures cadets not merely know leadership terms, but understand them, can translate them from one form into another, can interpret leadership principles, and make inferences. With a comprehension-level test, it is acceptable to conduct it open-book because the questions are not concerned with rote knowledge or memorization.

With that discussion as background, CAP could take an innovative approach to assessment in the cadet leadership education program, along these lines:

- Create open-book, online Leadership Achievement Tests at the comprehension level
- Continue to conduct milestone tests closed-book, during routine squadron meetings

⁴ For more about levels of learning, see Benjamin Bloom's *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*.

- Encourage commanders to use the Leadership Expectations chart as an assessment tool, and give cadets feedback about their leadership performance using the CAP Form 50, *Cadet Leadership Feedback*,⁵ two or three times per phase, versus just once as is the rule now.

Some practical benefits under such an assessment program include:

- The unit saves time by not having to proctor tests as frequently
- The unit saves on manpower by not needing a testing officer as often
- The unit is relieved of the administrative burden of maintaining test files, ensuring they have the most current version, photo-copying tests, contacting NHQ for additional tests, etc.
- Cadets get instant feedback on their test
- With an online system, cadets could test at home at their convenience.⁶ The “convenience factor” should boost cadet progression (without lowering standards) because cadets would no longer be beholden to the unit’s testing schedule. No longer would cadets be forced to choose between studying for a science test on a busy school night, or studying for a cadet achievement test – instead cadets would schedule their CAP tests around their schoolwork. This “convenience factor” is especially important because today’s youth are over-scheduled with school and other activities.⁷
- NHQ can monitor the ease and differentiation indices of each test – metrics that help test-writers ensure the test is fair. An online test can be easily edited and updated as necessary, whereas updating today’s written tests is a cumbersome and expensive process.

By 2007, nearly all cadets will have access to the web. According to the Pew Internet & American Life Project, 87% of cadet-aged youth had internet access in 2004. Nearly three years later, it is fair to assume that percentage has climbed even higher. For the few cadets who lack internet access (or access to school computers, or library computers, or friends’ computers), units could proctor the test at the squadron, open-book.

⁵ Newly revised and based on the Leadership Expectations chart (page 5), the CAP Form 50 is a key component of the leadership curriculum. It focuses cadets on how well they are demonstrating leadership skills and develops in them a habit of looking at their behavior as leaders.

⁶ Regarding testing at home, online, some safeguards could be implemented to help protect the integrity of the tests. For example, the software could be programmed to award credit to cadets only for completing the test required for their next achievement (thereby preventing cadets from “testing ahead” or “banking tests”). Also, the software could randomize the test questions, preventing cadets from cribbing from another cadet’s answer key.

⁷ David Brooks describes the hectic lives of over-scheduled youth in his April 2001 *Atlantic Monthly* article, “The Organization Kid.”

Part 3 THE WAY FORWARD

Fourteen years after publishing *Leadership: 2000 and Beyond*, it is time for CAP to develop a new leadership curriculum that speaks to today's cadets, is educationally-sound, respects the cadets' image of themselves as young leaders, and includes a full suite of resources, including a textbook, instructor guide, guidebook for conducting hands-on activities, and supplemental multi-media modules in the form of podcasts and webcasts.

The Cadet Programs team at NHQ is ready to begin this important work, in cooperation with an Advisory Board of USAF Air University experts, and a Field Review Committee of CAP volunteers. All Cadet Program leaders are invited to share their thoughts as this project moves forward. The tentative timeline for developing a new leadership curriculum is as follows:

TIMELINE

2007

- Analyze goals and content of similar youth programs (ie: AFJROTC, Scouting, Young Marines) and USAF officer accession programs
- Develop block objectives
- Vetting by Advisory Board
- Draft textbook and activity guide materials for Phase I & II cadets
- Vetting by Field Review Committee
- Editing
- Test writing
- Implement Phase I & II materials

2008

- Draft textbook and activity guide materials for Phase III & IV cadets
- Vetting by Field Review Committee
- Editing
- Test writing
- Implement Phase III & IV materials

FINAL THOUGHT

As CAP works to develop today's cadets into tomorrow's leaders, the words of the poet Yeats should be our guide:

"Education is not the filling of a pail but the lighting of a fire."

- WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS