

It's About Time: A Study of Cadet Time Availability vs. Requirements

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Abstract: The current mission of the United States Military Academy at West Point is to "to educate, train, and inspire the Corps of Cadets so that each graduate is a commissioned leader of character committed to the values of Duty, Honor, Country and prepared for a career of professional excellence and service to the Nation as an officer in the United States Army." When we consider the difference between "completion" of a course of study and professional "excellence," we pose a question: how much time do Cadets have after successfully fulfilling requirements set by Army and USMA-level leadership to pursue excellence? The question springs from commentary ongoing since the early-to-mid 1800s. Senior leaders have long observed the friction between time needed to complete a collegiate education while simultaneously becoming qualified to be commissioned into the regular Army and time in the day. Sylvanus Thayer, the "Father of the United States Military Academy" stated in an 1865 letter to George Cullum, "In my opinion more academic study is imposed upon cadets than they can thoroughly digest, and professors, in the desire to teach more, impart less." The pressure has not subsided. A total of approximately 4,400 Cadets (equivalent to one Army Brigade) serves four brigade-equivalent Commanders: the Commandant (military), Dean (Academics), Master of the Sword (physical), and the Director of the Simon Center for the Professional Ethic (character). A recent study showed that between 2011-2022, nearly 100 events and requirements were added to the schedule while a half dozen removed. When we combine the sheer number of activities with the West Point ideal of achieving "professional excellence," we again ponder: how much time is there for the pursuit of excellence? Within this study, we analyzed the time requirements of Cadets engaged in a club activity (49% of the Corps of Cadets), varsity or competitive club (26%), football (4%), or none of these (7%), across all four years at the Academy during an academic semester. Based upon the team's modeling assumptions, we found that there is enough time to successfully accomplish all graduation and commissioning requirements between the hours of 0520-2330 (Monday through Friday) and the duty hours defined on semester Saturdays, with an average of one to two hours of unstructured time per week. Placed in context of expectations levied at our peers at civilian institutions, the Cadet workload is more than a full-time college student simultaneously working a full-time job. Sensitivity analysis reveals that small changes to key assumptions results in the "slack time" resultant from the original model quickly moves to near zero for most cohorts of Cadets. Our modeling process did not account for factors that the Chaplin staff, Center for Enhanced Performance (CEP), Center for Personal Development (CPD), and SHARP Resource Center (SRC), identified as precursors to "burn out:" Personal (Family and Relationships, Depression, Sleep, Sexual Assault/Harassment), Academic (Time management, Honor and Discipline, Stress), Physical (injuries, DPE struggles), Military (Adjusting to lifestyle). When considering results holistically, we find that although the initial modeling process concluded there is technically enough time to successfully graduate and commission, there is pragmatically not enough time for the median West Point Cadet to pursue excellence and grow into the best version of themselves.

Keywords: Time Management, Graduation Requirements, Commissioning Requirements, Burnout