

Comprehensive Alumni Survey
Executive Summary | 8 August 2022

Purpose and Goals

The Association of Graduates' 2022 Survey of United States Air Force Academy Graduates is the most significant and robust assessment of USAFA alumni opinions in 15 years. The Association of Graduates (AOG), together with the Air Force Academy Foundation, undertook the survey with three goals in mind:

- 1) Solicit graduate feedback that the AOG can use in its strategic planning.
- 2) Establish new, updated statistical baselines related to graduate attitudes, perceptions, awareness and engagement.
- 3) Transparently share with graduates how they feel about their Academy and association.

Since the AOG, with the unanimous support of the board of directors, opened no-cost membership in the association to all graduates in January of 2022, nearly 4,000 graduates who were not previously members have joined (graduates can join the AOG [here](#)). With the new no-cost membership model in place, and the need to modernize the association, the AOG determined that soliciting all graduate feedback was crucial to its development of a five-year strategic plan. Of note, the last formal survey of graduates, occurring in 2006, was only of AOG members; it was not available to non-members. The expansion of membership in the AOG to all graduates in early 2022 necessitated the broadest-possible approach to gathering the feedback of the Long Blue Line.

To that end, in the fall of 2021, the AOG contracted with a professional research firm, Market Perceptions, to conduct robust qualitative and quantitative research yielding quality, representative data and findings that would be useful in its strategic planning.

Focus Groups

Critical to these efforts was the development of a quantitative survey capable of objectively capturing the most salient elements of graduates' opinions, along with the underlying reasons for those opinions.

To inform the content of the survey, the AOG conducted exploratory focus group research with graduates in December 2021, allowing members of the Long Blue Line to share their thoughts and opinions within structured discussions. The knowledge gained from those focus groups then informed the survey questions.

The exploratory focus group work allowed the AOG to hear the wide range of opinions that graduates held toward USAFA and their association, resulting in the creation and validation of six unique personas all related to level of pride. Graduates chose the one persona best

representing their feelings of pride toward USAFA. These personas proved essential to interpreting the data and representing the framework for analysis. The personas are:

- Actively Engaged
- Proud and Show It
- Inwardly Proud
- Not Valued by USAFA
- Lost Interest in USAFA
- At Odds with USAFA

Survey Data Collection

Following the focus groups, the AOG worked with Market Perceptions to develop the quantitative survey. The survey was developed in January and February. Between February 24 and March 28, 2022, 8,616 graduates participated in the Association of Graduates survey, with 7,268 completing the entire online survey, yielding response rates of 17% for partial completion and 14% for full completion. The statistical margin of sampling error on a sample size this large is +/- 1 percentage point at the 95% level of confidence.

The AOG made use of all of its communications channels to ensure as many graduates as possible were aware of and participated in the survey. Channels used included emails to all graduates with valid email addresses, postcards, text messages, social media (including paid promotion), ZoomiEnews and 7258' e-newsletters, *Checkpoints* magazine and peer-to-peer outreach through the Class Advisory Senate.

Data Weighting

Although the survey focused on pride and the most useful analysis broke down by personas, the AOG wanted to ensure the data collected demographically represented the Long Blue Line. To those ends, the data collected from graduates and used in the analysis were weighted by both gender and decade of graduation to bring other demographic characteristics even closer to the true population percentages. Most weights fell between values of 0.5 and 2.0, indicating that most groups were relatively close to their true populations and did not require extreme levels of adjustment.

Results

The survey results were so extensive that it is virtually impossible to speak to every notable finding in an executive summary. Among the key findings:

- **How proud of USAFA are graduates?**
On a scale of 1-10, with 10 being extremely proud, 40% of graduates rate their pride in USAFA at 9 or 10 (which we define as strong); 40% rate it at 7 or 8 (which we define as mediocre); and 20% rate it under 7 (which we define as low).

- **The survey asked graduates to match themselves with one of the six personas that best describe their pride in and connection to USAFA. How did they break down?**
7% describe themselves as “Actively Engaged”; 26% as “Proud and Show It”; 47% as “Inwardly Proud”; 7% as “Not Valued”; 5% as “Lost Interest”; and 8% as “At Odds.”

- **The survey revealed a strong emotional aspect to being a USAFA graduate.**
The survey allowed for comments. In all, graduates submitted 1,700 pages of comments, many expressing love for the Academy and some sharing anger and concern. Three examples include:

Actively Engaged: “Everything I am today comes from the opportunity to graduate from the greatest institution in America. I am proud to be part of a brother and sisterhood of almost 60,000 of the best America has to offer. I owe everything to the Academy and will always work hard to give back to the institution that formed me.”

Inwardly Proud: “It taught me that I was capable of more than I thought I was. It gave me the discipline to keep trying regardless of perceived obstacles. It taught me to maintain a focus under stress. Admittedly I didn't realize this until much later in life, but I am grateful for the qualities it developed in me.”

Not Valued: “I am glad [about] the things I accomplished but most of the activities are focused on those still active duty. There is not a lot of consideration or praise for those who took a different path and aren't part of the military or military-related industries. I chose to do Troops to Teachers but you hear very little about those of us who chose to serve in this way.”

- **Many of the same issues that have caused division in the country have affected how graduates feel about their Academy.**

The survey asked graduates if their opinion of USAFA had changed because of disagreements on politics, race and other issues. Five percent said they have a more positive opinion of USAFA; 45% said their opinion of USAFA has not changed; 42% said they have a less positive opinion of USAFA; and 8% said they have no opinion.

- **How do graduates want to be involved in USAFA and their AOG?**

Mentoring cadets and/or graduates in their area of expertise, knowing about and networking with fellow grads in their local community, and helping cadets who may be struggling with life at the Academy all got strong response for ways graduates may want to be involved going forward.

- **What makes graduates most proud of the Academy?**

Topping the list are watching an Air Force flyover, seeing positive media coverage of the Academy, connecting with classmates and other graduates, and wearing a class ring and/or USAFA clothing.

- **Trajectory of pride**

Graduates were asked to think about and reflect upon the varying levels of pride they have felt towards USAFA over time—from the day they were accepted into the Academy through how they feel today. The data collected indicated two points in time stand out as the pinnacle of graduates’ pride: the day they were accepted into the Academy and the day they graduated. The lowest point in graduates’ pride, overall, is how they feel about the Academy today.

- **How do graduates feel about the Association of Graduates?**

41% of survey respondents said they have a very positive or somewhat positive opinion of the association; while 46% answered neutral and 13% said they have a negative opinion.

- **What can the AOG do to best support graduates?**

On ways graduates said the AOG can best support the Long Blue Line, topping the list are helping graduates make career connections or transitions (79%); helping graduates find other graduates who can provide mentorship and advice (66%); and providing graduates with greater access to the Academy for visits, tours, events, etc. (62%).

Next Steps

The AOG and the Air Force Academy Foundation are using the survey results as a guide star in their efforts to develop a new joint five-year strategic plan. The strategic plan framework is in draft form. In the fall of 2022, the plan will receive final review at the board of directors level and will be shared with key graduate groups and then the full graduate community.

The process of transforming the association under the new strategic plan is estimated to span 12-18 months. In the meantime, the survey results are available for graduates to review. The strategic plan, once approved, will be shared with the graduate community once approved.