

Spotlight on ILA Members

ILA Members are doing amazing leadership work around the world, from starting new degree programs to nurturing young leaders who make a difference, from running innovative workshops and seminars to fostering organizational change.

The Journey to Develop Leaders of Character

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Each year, eleven hundred young men and women step off a bus and stand firmly on painted footprints at the bottom of a ramp crowned with the words “Integrity First, Service Before Self, Excellence in All We Do.” As these soon-to-be cadets accept the challenge to ascend the “Core Values Ramp” and enter their lives at the Air Force Academy, they also embark on a journey of character and leadership development that will last the rest of their lives.

Since 1959, the Air Force Academy has pursued its mission to create “leaders of character” for service to the nation—engaging cadets across athletic, academic, military, spiritual and even airmanship-focused domains. In 2009, the Academy formally stood up the Center for Character and Leadership Development (CCLD) to more intentionally design, deliver and integrate developmental programs and initiatives across the 4-year cadet experience. In essence, CCLD’s goal is to ensure that the conversation around character and leadership becomes “the air we breathe” at the Academy—

something always present and fundamentally embedded in the cadets’ day-to-day lives.

In addition to supporting the cadet-run Honor Code (“We will not lie, steal or cheat, nor tolerate among us anyone who does.”), CCLD engages with cadets by offering a number of focused developmental programs and events throughout the year. For example, each year, cadets spend at least one full day focused on their character and leadership development at either the personal, interpersonal, team or organizational level. Topics in these sessions include personal values identification, respect and responsibility, empathy toward others, servant leadership, commitment clarification, and ethical decision-making. These sessions complement theories and content they explore in their formal leadership and philosophy courses. In addition, each February, the Academy suspends classes for two days to host the internationally-acclaimed National Character and Leadership Symposium (NCLS), bringing in top speakers to engage Academy cadets, faculty and



staff, as well as visiting students, faculty and community members. The 2012 NCLS is scheduled for Feb 23rd-24th, and will again showcase presenters from academics, sports, military, non-profit and corporate areas all around the theme “Walking the Walk.”

In 2011, CCLD has indeed been busy. A number of important initiatives have marked the progress of USAFA’s character and leadership mission.

First, 2011 saw the unveiling of CCLD’s Conceptual Framework for character and leadership development, providing a guiding model for the Center’s initiatives and programs. This framework, grounded in theory and best practices, is organized around three fundamental elements: Own, Engage and Practice.

Colonel Joseph Sanders, the Director of CCLD, emphasizes, “The Framework is critically important for us in that it provides a conceptual touchstone and common language that keeps us focused on those things we know are essential for character and leadership development.” A key aspect

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of this language is an operational definition of a “leader of character” that again serves as an actionable guide for CCLD training and education. Specifically, it clarifies that a leader of character: 1) **Lives honorably**: consistently practicing the virtues inherent in the Air Force Core Values. (These virtues include, among other things: courage, self-discipline, accountability, respect, fairness and honesty); 2) **Lifts others to their best possible selves**, and; 3) **Elevates performance to a common and noble purpose**.

With this definition clarifying the target for development, all those involved must take ownership in the pursuit of that identity through their attitude and effort, their commitments, their duty, and their role in the development process. Next, both those developing and those supporting that development must “engage” in a purposeful relationship. These roles are anchored in the need for assessment, challenge and support (elements reflecting best practices of the Center for Creative Leadership). Finally, the character and leadership virtues highlighted in the engagement process must be applied and practiced in the real world. This practice leads to habits of honorable thoughts and actions, requiring individuals to consistently cross the “decision-action gap.” Together, these elements comprise CCLD’s conceptual framework for character and leadership development -- offered to organizations across the Academy and beyond as a resource to support the goal of developing leaders of character. Recently, this framework has been presented to very receptive audiences at international academic and practitioner-focused conferences, as well as to sports teams, corporate managers and military leaders.

CCLD has also recently released several new hard-copy and electronic publications, each directed at audiences interested in character and leadership. Collectively, these publications exist to foster a conversation about relevant

and timely character and ship topics using a number of different scholarly vehicles from both academic scholars and practitioners.

The *Journal of Character & Leadership Integration* (JCLI) is our cornerstone peer-reviewed academic journal, created to promote a new field of study and discussion in the area where character and leadership intersect. The time has never been more critical for us to understand how moral and ethical dimensions interact with the complexity of leadership in all contexts! CCLD feels it is important that this conversation be grounded in theory and empirical examination, while at the same time, ensuring that it is applicable in the real world. As such, JCLI offers a unique balance of voices from across multiple disciplines. It presents conceptual and empirical articles, complemented by senior leader perspectives and interviews from a diverse set of domains (e.g., military, industry, non-profit, etc). [Access an interactive, electronic version of the Journal of Character & Leadership Integration.](#)

CCLD’s newest scholarly product is the quarterly e-publication, *Character Connections*. This online, interactive conversation-starter offers a new thought-provoking question each issue (e.g., “Is Duty dead?”, “How do you lead those you perceive are uncommitted?”), and then showcases a number of brief 2 to 3-page, influential articles from invited authors responding to the question. The electronic format also allows for the reader community to submit comments and responses to the individual articles or the overall issue. [The inaugural issue of Character Connections can be accessed online.](#) Issue #2 will be released in January, 2012.

Finally, CCLD has created a monograph publication called *Scholar Briefs*, designed to provide thoughtful, academic explorations on specific topics related to the broad theme of

ILA members are highly encouraged to contribute to any of these publication. Contributions are welcomed from a number of sources in an effort to promote diversity of ideas and approaches. These publications differ with regard to the target audience, formality of the submissions (i.e., traditional academic, more “open” monograph, or less formal “influence” papers), and frequency of publication.

To contribute or to request to be added to the publication e-distribution list e-mail
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character and leadership. This format provides more depth than the relatively brief thought pieces published in CCLD’s quarterly, online “Character Connections,” and allows for more flexibility and less formality than the articles published in JCLI. These submissions are stand-alone documents that allow the authors to “get on their soapbox,” and influence an audience on a focused character and leadership topic. In addition, the insights and opinions expressed by these scholars may be directed at more targeted audiences than in our traditional publications. The first two Scholar Brief topics were, “Return to Duty” (focused on the shifting culture at the Air Force Academy around the concept of duty) and “In Math, It All Counts” (exploring how to introduce character development into even technical courses). We invite and welcome contributions from a wide range of perspectives and disciplines on all topics related to character and leadership.

As the Air Force Academy and CCLD look forward to 2012, the mission to develop leaders of character is more important than ever. ILA members are invited to join the conversation to advance the study and understanding of this critical topic, wherever that journey may lead.