

Senior ROTC Preparation Guide

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Many Junior ROTC (JROTC) cadets will attend college after high school and pursue officer commissions. For those who meet all qualification prerequisites (academic, behavioral and medical), the United States Army offers commissioning options that fits their education plans and career goals. Generally speaking, a high school JROTC applicant has two immediate options: the United States Military Academy (USMA) at West Point or the Senior Reserve Officers Training Corps (SROTC). Online guidance for both is posted at www.usma.edu or www.armyrotc.com.

Appointments to the USMA are limited and have fairly stringent prerequisites. Conversely, SROTC programs are offered on over 270 college campuses nation-wide and enrollment is much easier, making it the most viable commissioning route for most to pursue. Army ROTC produces roughly 70% of all Army officers. While this guide will focus on SROTC, most guidance is applicable to college preparation in the general sense.

Senior ROTC Program—General Information

The SROTC program is composed of two separate courses: the Basic Course (freshman and sophomore years) and the Advanced Course (junior and senior years). Junior ROTC cadets who complete at least three years of JROTC can receive advanced placement credit for the SROTC Basic Course. Those completing two years of JROTC generally receive credit for the first year of SROTC but may receive credit for the entire SROTC Basic course depending on how much of the JROTC curriculum they completed. This is discussed in detail online and JROTC Senior Army Instructors (SAI) can also advise cadets on placement credit.

Preparation for College and SROTC Scholarship Boards

The U.S. Army Cadet Command (USACC) looks for intelligent, athletic, and well-rounded high school students with resumes that indicate applicants have leader potential. Before individual SROTC programs conduct local 4-year scholarship boards, the USACC will have already awarded points for academics, athletics, individual achievements and organizational participation based on a Whole Person Score (WPS). The more points one has accumulated when submitting a SROTC scholarship application, the higher the pre-board WPS. The latter is worth a maximum of 55 potential points and is based entirely on high school achievements. The Professor of Military Science (PMS) interview is worth up to 10 points and the local SROTC scholarship board can award up to 35 more points. As such, it is critical for 4-year scholarship applicants to maximize their WPS potential as early as possible during their high school years.

The USACC recruiting profile is called the “Scholar-Athlete-Leader” (SAL). While this is true for both high school applicants and enrolled college students, it is most applicable to high school applicants since they are not yet enrolled in SROTC where the instructors can assess them on site. In some cases, the SROTC cadre may not meet a 4-year scholarship winner until after the scholarship is awarded; while not ideal, scholarship awards to out-of-state students is sometimes

a “leap of faith” based on the WPS scores and phone interviews. Regardless, it is difficult for high school juniors and seniors—JROTC or otherwise—starting late in high school to build a significant WPS resume; therefore, it is essential that JROTC cadets start preparing for SROTC during their freshman and sophomore years of high school. A detailed look at each aspect of the SAL profile follows.

1. Scholar. College-bound students should strive to attain at least a 3.0 GPA (preferably much higher) during their high school studies to demonstrate a propensity for scholarly achievement. Likewise, they should score at least 1100 on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) or 24 composite American College Test (ACT) to increase admissions probability at competitive universities. It is generally helpful to purchase SAT or ACT study manuals early in high school to prepare for later testing. Scholarship applicants should research universities’ admissions websites to determine the minimum SAT or ACT scores required for unconditional admittance. This is important to consider *before* submitting an Army ROTC scholarship application since an applicant with a low SAT/ACT score will obviously compete against other applicants with higher scores. This influences both the ROTC packet (specifically WPS score) and overall college admittance potential. While Cadet Command might allow one to apply for a 4-year scholarship with a 950 SAT score, the applicant’s preferred college might not accept the applicant unconditionally. A strong SAT or ACT score will significantly increase the potential for both unconditional admittance and an ROTC scholarship offer. In cases where an applicant receives a low SAT or ACT, he or she should intensely study reference materials and take practice tests and then retake the test to earn a higher score. Ultimately Cadet Command will post the highest score attained in the applicant’s online WPS file. Resist the urge to attribute college examination tests as biased, for colleges have used them for decades and the tested information is standardized.
2. Athlete. It is *absolutely* impossible to separate athleticism from officership! While some find it contentious to suggest that marching band, shooting teams, or drill teams are not “sports,” by definition they are activities. The primary team sports SROTC scholarship boards view as most valuable are football, soccer, basketball, baseball, softball, track, swimming, wrestling, crew, etc. Many 4-year scholarship applicants often find themselves listed as order of merit list (OML) alternates because they did not participate in demanding sports during high school. Again, it is critical for JROTC cadets planning to apply for Army ROTC scholarships to participate in organized team sports during high school to gain credible points from SROTC scholarship boards when they apply as high school seniors.
3. Leader. It is possible to gain “leader” points from a wide range of high school activities. The key is involvement and documenting participation. Scouting, JROTC, Boys/Girls State, 4-H, debate team, student government association, marching band, chorus, academic clubs, and other high school activities offering leadership opportunities add points to the applicant’s online WPS, plus indicate to the local SROTC board reviewers a propensity for seeking leadership roles within organizational settings. Some high schools do not offer many sports or activities, so it is useful to seek these opportunities elsewhere—church groups, civic organizations, charities, etc. All JROTC cadets who

apply themselves and then pursue 4-year SROTC scholarships have a clear advantage over non-JROTC applicants in the Leader category.

So what happens if a student attends a small or rural high school where few athletic or leadership opportunities exist? What about students who work to help support their families and don't have time to pursue athletic and extracurricular activities? The USACC SAL profile can still accommodate these students by awarding scholarship board points for equivalent activities and commensurate work experience. Essentially an SROTC board will consider what the applicant did in lieu of athletic or leadership pursuits because Newton's Law applies—"Bodies in motion tend to remain in motion whereas bodies at rest tend to remain at rest." For example, an applicant who worked 30 hours per week during both the junior and senior years could potentially have more WPS points than an applicant who played three sports. That said a local SROTC scholarship board may still place a higher preference on applications with proven Athlete and Leader achievements. This makes it even more important for aspiring scholarship applicants to contact the Army ROTC departments at their preferred universities and discuss their intentions with the ROTC cadre. Their personal knowledge of an inbound or applying cadet is always a positive. College visits are also very helpful—the earlier the better.

Scholarship Boards

In many cases, the local SROTC program has an opportunity to meet with 4-year scholarship applicants before it conducts the local board—again, this is an ideal situation. However, once all interviews have occurred and the PMS convenes the local board, an OML is developed and finalists selected based on the number of 4-year scholarships the SROTC program has to offer its applicants. The large SROTC programs tend to have more scholarship allocations, but any advantage here to a specific applicant is generally offset by the large programs' higher applicant numbers. In all cases, offers are centralized at Cadet Command, which then forwards offers to finalists via mail based on the OMLs sent by the individual SROTC program. While the individual programs may notify intended winners of a pending "intent to offer" a 4-year scholarship, the SROTC programs do not in reality make the official offers. Only Cadet Command makes offers until the "open season" discussed below; even then, each SROTC program must manage offers through HQ, Cadet Command for legal accountability.

Typically three 4-year scholarship rounds occur (October, February and April) followed by the open season that runs from 1 June until classes start the following August. Some SROTC programs make offers during the early round (Oct) but others do not since the military academies do not make offers until late winter. Virtually every SROTC program makes offers in Round 2 (Feb) and adjusts its OML and offers for Round 3 (Apr) based on the accepted offers and declinations from Round 2. After accepts and declinations are in for Round 3, programs may then select their open season (1 June) offers from remaining alternates on their OMLs who enroll at their universities during the summer or in August. This is a long process during the summer months and changes to the OML and offers are both inevitable and expected. In extreme cases, an SROTC program may not know until classes begin in August which 4-year scholarship winners will actually show up and enroll.

Once enrolled, a scholarship winner has 45 days from the start of classes to “validate” his or her 4-year scholarship. Part of the scholarship validation process is passing the Army Physical Fitness Test or APFT. It is extremely important for scholarship applicants—winners and alternates—to train diligently during the summer months in order to pass the APFT upon arrival to campus for the fall semester. Failing to pass the APFT by the regulatory deadline will result in revocation of a scholarship offer. This does happen to a few 4-year scholarship winners each year either because they suffered injuries before enrolling or—worse—simply failed to prepare.

One frequently overlooked aspect by many 4-year scholarship applicants is the critical need to complete the DOD Medical Examination Review Board (DODMERB) physical quickly—meaning *before* the local SROTC scholarship board convenes. In some cases, an SROTC board may give higher local board assessments to applicants who have completed the DODMERB and lower marks to applicants who have not or who lack a strong athletic resume, appear to exceed weight limits, or performed poorly on the Presidential Fitness Test. Applicants should strive to complete the DODMERB as soon as possible upon submitting their applications to Cadet Command. If an applicant has “remedial” issues to resolve, it is strongly recommended to complete the resolution as soon as possible after discovery.

Scholarship Alternates

All high school applicants who list a university are generally boarded by that SROTC program during its 4-year scholarship board. They remain on the local scholarship OML through the end of the following school year. When primary 4-year winners do not validate their scholarships during the first semester, their offers are withdrawn and the allocations are generally re-awarded to the next alternate on the OML. That’s also another reason fully-qualified alternates who strongly desire to attend a specific university’s SROTC program should consider enrolling there despite their OML alternate status. Likewise, there are many instances where an alternate decided not to attend a preferred university due to his or her alternate status and then additional scholarship allocations were given to that program that the alternate could have filled. Even then, there is always a potential that 3.5-year scholarship opportunities can arise when Cadet Command has unused funding.

Alternates for 4-year scholarships should not give up because additional Army ROTC scholarships are generally available over time. Programs normally receive 3-year and 2-year allocations that they fill with enrolled cadets. Some SROTC programs have difficulty filling all these scholarship allocations during a given year; in these cases, the programs “return” the unused allocations to their supporting ROTC brigade for use by other SROTC programs that need more for their qualified applicants. Also, Nursing scholarships are managed from a different funding source and nearly always available. Recently Cadet Command also announced a planned initiative to fund critical languages scholarships.

Simultaneous Membership Program (SMP)

The SMP option is available to students who are not interested in scholarships or want to serve in Reserve Component units while they attend college. It is unique to the Army and available to veterans, Leader’s Training Course graduates, and Army Reserve (USAR) and Army National

Guard (ARNG) soldiers. The SMP option allows cadets to pay for college with a combination of personal funds, part-time employment, accrued veterans' benefits (i.e. Montgomery GI Bill and Army College Fund), Reserve Component tuition assistance, or student financial aid available through their university. Most of all, an SMP cadet gains valuable leadership experience while concurrently enrolled in the Army ROTC Advanced Course. An applicant must have at least sophomore or higher academic standing, meet all Army ROTC enrollment prerequisites, and gain permission from both the unit commander and the Professor of Military Science before signing the commissioning contract. Upon contracting, the SMP cadet earns E5 (Sergeant) pay for weekend drills and 2-week annual training periods, qualifies for the SROTC subsistence allowance, is non-deployable while contracted in SROTC, and may compete for Airborne and other specialized training. Also, SMP cadets may contract for either Active Duty or Guaranteed Reserve Forces Duty. In addition to the SROTC department and Army ROTC websites, any USAR or ARNG recruiter can provide information or guidance on SMP options.

Prior Enlisted Service

Many JROTC cadets will postpone college to enlist in the Active Army, USAR, or ARNG. Since completion of basic training provides placement credit for the first two years of Army ROTC, some soldiers will forego the SROTC Basic Course and focus on their academic curricula during their freshman and sophomore years; however, many take the Basic Course classes for the experience and camaraderie—mostly a matter of personal preference. Veterans may also apply for 3-year or 2-year campus-based Army ROTC scholarships. (All scholarship recipients are required to take certain Army ROTC courses as part of the SROTC curriculum.) However, from a financial perspective, the most viable option for veterans is to join a USAR or ARNG unit and then concurrently enroll in SROTC as an SMP cadet. The latter is particularly true in states with low resident tuition where the veterans qualify for in-state tuition. As explained earlier, an SMP cadet continues to accrue both experience and longevity, builds networks of peers and influencers, and has access to any military support facilities and services in his or her area.

Green to Gold Program (Active Duty Soldiers)

The Green to Gold Program has both scholarship and non-scholarship options that active duty soldiers can apply for, but for brevity is not discussed in this guide. Information on Green to Gold options is online at www.goarmy.com/rotc/enlisted_soldiers.jsp.

Summary

Contact the SROTC department at the desired college for additional guidance and assistance. The Army ROTC website www.armyrotc.com contains links to every SROTC department in Cadet Command. Use email to the extent possible and keep the Recruiting Operations Officer at your preferred or desired colleges informed of your location, contact information, and intention. Persistence pays so start early.

Talk to your SAI about SROTC enrollment options—chances are high that they are SROTC alumni. There is plenty of information online so surf the Internet for the latest guidance. Don't

overlook former cadets from your JROTC program who are now enrolled in SROTC, for they are also excellent references. You'll find that many officers in local USAR and ARNG units are also Army ROTC graduates and some may have attended your preferred universities. Always seek information from as many sources as possible to help you prepare for both college and SROTC. Doing this will help you make informed decisions and set you up for success!

Remember, the Army is always looking for sharp young leaders to lead soldiers and the future of this great Republic depends on the Army's success both on the battlefield and as an institution. Indeed, many of the great captains of industry began their careers as Second Lieutenants in the United States Army.

Now you should have a clear picture of how to prepare for entry into the Senior Army ROTC program. So what are you waiting for? Start early, stay focused, and we'll see you on campus!

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