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Congressional Nominations to U.S. Service Academies: Candidate Qualifications and Noncongressional Nominating Authorities

Members of Congress are authorized by law to nominate candidates for appointment to four U.S. service academies. These schools are the U.S. Military Academy (USMA); U.S. Naval Academy (USNA); U.S. Air Force Academy (USAFA); and U.S. Merchant Marine Academy (USMMA). A fifth service academy, the U.S. Coast Guard Academy (USCGA), does not require a congressional nomination for appointment.

Although it is an essential component of the appointment process, a congressional nomination does not guarantee an individual’s admission or appointment to a service academy. Each academy requires the submission of a preliminary application to initiate the admissions process. In addition to requesting a nomination from a Member of Congress or another nominating official, an individual seeking appointment to a service academy must separately apply to the service academies to which he or she seeks to be appointed. Even when a candidate meets all these requirements and is deemed to be qualified for admission, he or she may not receive an official appointment, due to the limited number of spaces available at each service academy.

This In Focus provides applicant qualification information for USMA, USNA, USAFA, USMMA, and USCGA; a timeline of actions for prospective nominees (**Figure 1**); and discussion of noncongressional appointment authorities to some service academies. It can be used to inform congressional staff of basic candidate qualifications or be provided to constituents who aspire to enroll in a service academy and seek a congressional nomination. Additional information for congressional offices is available in CRS In Focus IF13220, *Congressional Nominations to U.S. Service Academies: Member Office Management Considerations*, CRS Report RL33213, *Congressional Nominations to U.S. Service Academies: An Overview and Resources for Outreach and Management*, and CRS Infographic IG10096, *U.S. Service Academy Nominations: Timelines*.

Acceptance and successful completion of a service academy appointment requires at least a nine-year obligation, including four years of tuition-free preparation at an academy and five years of active duty service as an officer in the regular or reserve components of the military or the merchant marine.

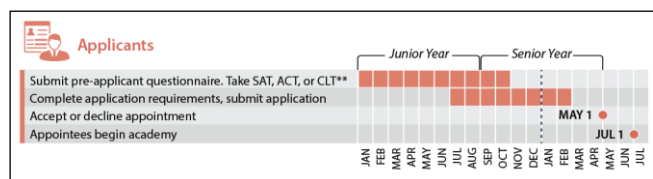
Applicant Qualifications

To qualify for an appointment to any service academy, an applicant must meet the following criteria:

- U.S. citizen or national; at least 17 years of age and not yet 23 years of age on July 1 of the year the applicant would enter an academy (25 years of age for USMMA);
- unmarried;
- not pregnant, and without legal obligation to support children or other dependents;
- demonstrate comprehensive academic preparation; demonstrate leadership in athletics and other extracurricular activities;
- take the SAT or ACT (or CLT for applicants to USMA, USNA, or USAFA);
- pass a comprehensive medical examination administered by the Department of Defense Medical Examination Review Board; and
- pass the Candidate Fitness Assessment for academies to which the applicant is applying: USMA, USNA, USAFA, USMMA, USCGA.

Beyond what is required in federal law and regulation, each academy can further specify academic, physical, and leadership requirements for admission. The extent and nature of eligibility and recommended preparation varies by academy. Links to each academy’s expectations are provided in **Table 1**.

Figure 1. Timeline for Potential Applicants to Service Academies



Source: CRS compilation based on information from the service academies’ websites and congressional guides. Graphic created by Brion Long, Visual Information Specialist.

Notes: Timeline provides generalized information representing when events and activities most frequently occur. ** All four academies accept SAT and ACT results. USMA, USNA, and USAFA accept CLT results.

Table 1. Service Academy Applicant Preparation Links

USMA	https://www.westpoint.edu/admissions/steps-to-admission
USNA	https://www.usna.edu/Admissions/Apply/FAQ.php
USAFA	https://www.academyadmissions.com/requirements/academic/
USMMA	https://www.usmma.edu/node/8266
USCGA	https://uscga.edu/admissions/admission-requirements/

Source: Service academies.

Noncongressional Nominating Officials

Although congressional offices provide most of the nominations each year, a smaller number of nominations to the Department of Defense (DOD) service academies—USMA, USNA, and USAFA—are made by executive branch officials. (Pursuant to Executive Order 14347 dated September 5, 2025, DOD is also “using a secondary Department of War designation.”) All qualified nominees not selected for appointment through the congressional nomination process are considered qualified alternates for the purposes of selection by the Secretaries of the Army, Navy, and Air Force and the academy superintendents to their respective academies. Applicants requesting congressional nominations are also eligible for nominations from the Vice President. Vice presidential nominations are made for the nation at large, and applicants may apply for those through the White House with supporting materials submitted through each DOD service academy. Other nomination and appointment sources are only available to those with a military service-connection. The governor of Puerto Rico may also nominate a candidate who is a native of Puerto Rico to each academy. The distribution of nominations by noncongressional authorities is listed in **Table 2**.

Table 2. Distribution of Noncongressional Nominations to Department of Defense Service Academies, by Authority

Nominating Authority	Number and Type
President	100 children of living or deceased members of the Armed Forces with eight years of service. The President is also authorized to appoint an unlimited number of children whose parents have been awarded the Medal of Honor.
Vice President	Five, at large.
Service Secretary	85 enlisted members each of the regular and reserve services of the Secretary’s branch. 20 honor graduates of designated honor schools in any military branch, and from members of the Secretary’s service Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC). 150 qualified alternates who received congressional nominations but were not appointed, in order of merit.
Service Academy Superintendent	50, at large. 65 children of deceased, 100% disabled, or missing/captured Armed Forces veterans or missing/captured federal civilian personnel.
Governor, Puerto Rico	One, who must be a native of Puerto Rico.

Source: 10 U.S.C. 7442, USMA; 10 U.S.C. 8454, USNA; and 10 U.S.C. 9442, USAFA.

At the conclusion of the nomination and academy admissions processes, in his capacity as commander in chief of the military, the President is the appointing authority for all DOD service academy admissions.

USMMA nominations are governed by regulations issued by the Department of Transportation. USCGA does not require a congressional nomination for appointment.

Sarah J. Eckman, Analyst in American National Government

R. Eric Petersen, Specialist in American National Government

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