

Team USAFA (Alumni, Parents, Cadets, Permanent Party & Supporters)

Recently, our Academy has come under scrutiny for a briefing that occurred throughout the Cadet Wing on the topic of Diversity and Inclusion. Certain elements of the briefing were taken out of context and misrepresented, and this has caused much concern among our USAFA Family. I want to provide you with as much detail and perspective as I can, so you can understand this situation based on the facts. My goal is to ensure confidence in your Academy and in our ability to accomplish our steadfast mission to “Develop Leaders of Character.”

The intent behind having this briefing was to help our cadets in their quest to become leaders of character for our Air Force and Space Force, which will always be our prime directive at USAFA. Our cadets will be charged to lead teams of people comprised of Americans that don’t necessarily look like, think like, or speak like they do, but are unified by our common purpose to support and defend the Constitution of the United States. Our diversity is an American strength, and it opens the door to creative and innovative solutions, which will give us the strategic edge our Country needs in the future. Our Cadets will not get to choose the teams they serve with, yet it will be their duty to maximize the full potential of each member of their unit as they work together to solve tough problems, to present our adversaries with even tougher problems, and to win our Nation’s Wars.

The briefing was developed by cadets with the assistance of USAFA Staff to offer tools and techniques to build effective, inclusive teams made up of diverse members. The entire Wing participated, and the conversations were led by cadets within each of their 40 respective squadrons. There were ice-breaker events throughout the sessions, so the cadets could have open conversations about the subject matter.

The portion of the briefing that garnered scrutiny is the slide titled “Inclusive Language.” Throughout my Air Force Career, I’ve been taught that words matter, and this slide highlights that adage. This section of the briefing was intended to give cadets an idea of the kinds of words that are effective when respectful leaders build strong, inclusive teams. It was NOT intended to prohibit the use of any words. In particular, the words “mom” and “dad” are absolutely NOT prohibited words at USAFA. I highlight that because if I did prohibit the use of the word “mom,” my mom and my wife would probably never speak to me again. The briefing did not prohibit the use of any words, but it offered cadets tools and examples of words to use as they get to know their teammates and understand their context rather than working off assumptions. Not every family has a mom and a dad, and some people have neither because grandparents, aunts, uncles, or friends raised them. There are a lot of possibilities, and we should respect everyone’s situation and not make assumptions. Certainly, once we learn the terms our subordinates use for their family, which in many cases will include mom and dad, we should use those terms.

In another example, I grew up using the term “you guys” for any group of people regardless of the gender makeup of that group. I also used the term while I was a B-1 Bomber squadron commander whenever I spoke to my squadron, until the two women aviators in my unit informed me one day that they weren’t “guys” and would like to be included when I addressed the squadron. It was an awkward and embarrassing moment for me, but I was grateful for their candor. Since then, I try to refrain from using “you guys” unless it’s appropriate, and I refer to the groups I lead as “Team,” which in my opinion is the language of champions! My hope is that our cadets learn these lessons now rather than as Lt Col squadron commanders in an awkward moment. If they do, they will create cultures of dignity and

respect everywhere they serve, and our Air Force and Space Force will be better for it. That is what respectful leaders do, and that is who we are trying to inspire our cadets to be.

Some of you may believe this entire effort is about political correctness, but I assure you this is all about preparing future warfighters. Some of the commentary I have received is that USAFA has lost our warfighting focus. This is patently untrue. Within the Cadet Wing alone, cadets receive more than 1,000 hours of warfighter-focused training over their four years here. This does not include athletics, academic coursework, or formal programs such as combatives, water survival, or the multi-domain lab. By comparison, cadets receive 16 hours of AFI-directed diversity and inclusion education throughout their entire cadet career.

I grew up in a world that was very different than the world our cadets are growing up in, and I fought in wars that were very different than the wars they will fight. Our Country becomes more diverse every day, and capitalizing on our uniquely American strength of diversity will give us a strategic boost and provide an advantage over our competitors now and in the future. If we are going to defend America, we need to look like America and be prepared to fight with the full force of our population. Effective leaders make effective teams, and effective teams make our Air Force and Space Force the best in the world. My job, and the job of everyone who serves our cadets, is to prepare them to lead with character and to win our wars not five years from now, but 15 or 25 years from now. We must develop leaders who **live honorably** in every aspect of their lives, **lift others** to be their best possible selves, and **elevate performance** towards a common, noble purpose. That is my charge, and I will continue to give our cadets everything I have to accomplish that mission.

Thank you for what you do to support our Academy!

Very Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "R. M. Clark". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "R." and last name "Clark" clearly distinguishable.

RICHARD M. CLARK, Lt Gen, USAF
Superintendent, USAFA