

USNA Talking Points on High-Interest Topics

Winter 2022

The following key messages and talking points on specific topics of interest to USNA alumni are authorized for use by senior Alumni Association/Foundation leadership (CEO, Executive VPs for Engagement/Comms/Marketing, etc.) to alumni only, on behalf of the U.S. Naval Academy Superintendent. Further questions regarding the topics should be directed to the Naval Academy Public Affairs Officer, CDR Alana Garas at garas@usna.edu.

Topic 1: Widespread Cheating on December 2020 Physics Exam

Key Messages and Talking Points:

- Character development is the single most important thing we do here in Annapolis as we prepare leaders for the Navy and the Marine Corps and our Nation.
- We must ensure that honor and integrity are the central tenets of every single midshipmen's character that graduates from the U.S. Naval Academy.
- The Brigade owns and administers accountability within the Honor Concept in order to ensure the moral development necessary to move forward and grow from this incident.
- Every midshipman on the Yard and members of the Naval Academy faculty and staff have a critical role to play in preserving the integrity, honor, and conscience of the Naval Academy.
- The Naval Academy completed adjudications of honor violations that occurred during the SP211 General Physics I exam in December 2020; ultimately 18 midshipmen were separated from the Naval Academy.
 - The remaining 82 midshipmen faced severe sanctions, loss of class privileges, a D or F in Aptitude, and were enrolled in a five-month honor remediation process with a senior O-5 or O-6 on the Yard. In order to be retained, the midshipmen were required to successfully complete the honor remediation program.
 - The mission of the United States Naval Academy is "to *develop* midshipmen morally, mentally, and physically and *imbue* them with the highest ideals of duty, honor, and loyalty." Due to the unique circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic, many members of the Class of 2023 spent six to eight months away from Annapolis and therefore had less opportunities to be influenced and molded by leadership and their peers. As the 82 retained midshipmen had no previous honor offenses or significant conduct issues, they were given a second opportunity to meet our high standards.
- There are no immediate, sweeping changes that can be made to instantly correct the environment that contributed to widespread cheating.

- Procedural changes to exam administration were implemented, but they are not sufficient to accomplish this objective.
- Simply deterring midshipmen from committing honor violations will not properly prepare them for the moral and ethical challenges they will face in the Fleet.
- This major incident stresses the need to renew and strengthen efforts in moral development throughout the Brigade of Midshipmen and prioritize this training.
- The entire Brigade of Midshipmen conducted intensive training and in-depth, facilitated discussions on honor in April 2021, and there is a renewed focus on character and professional development throughout this academic year.

https://www.usna.edu/NewsCenter/2021/08/USNA_COMPLETES_PHYSICS_EXAM_INVESTIGATION,_18_MIDSHIPMEN_SEPARATED.php

Topic 2: Painting Tecumseh/Tamanend

Key Messages and Talking Points:

- At the Academy, we are no longer referring to the statue overlooking T-Court as being that of Tecumseh. We instead use Tamanend's name to reflect who the statue actually portrays.
- When the wooden figurehead of the Delaware Indian Chief was brought to the Naval Academy following the Civil War, there was no indication who the statue portrayed and the midshipmen eventually settled on the nickname Tecumseh.
- When the wooden statue had decayed into a state of disrepair, the Class of 1891 took it upon themselves to have the statue cast in bronze and presented the current bronze statue of Tamanend to the Brigade and Naval Academy. It should be noted that the Class of 1891 recognized the statue, the former figurehead of USS Delaware, portrayed Tamanend, not Tecumseh. In fact, in the dedication speech, there are two notable passages:
 - "History declares that Tamanend 'stands foremost in the list of all great men of his nation in any age. He was a mighty warrior, an accomplished statesman, and a pure and high-minded patriot. In private life, he was as distinguished for his Virtues as in public life he was for his talents. His countrymen could only account for the perfections they ascribed to him by supposing him to be favored with the special communications of the Great Spirit. During the Revolutionary War, the memory of the character and patriotism of Tamanend was so glorified by the Americans as well as their Indian Allies that he was dubbed 'Saint Tamanend' and May First was set upon the calendars as 'Saint Tamanend' Day."
 - "Midshipmen of the present and the future, we ask you to bind to your hearts the Traditions of the Service and to emulate the courage and fortitude and patience of this great Indian Chief Tamanend, of the Delawares, whose admirable traits of character are so well defined in this statue."

- It is fitting that we return the name Tamanend to the statue that was so lovingly and carefully preserved by the Class of 1891 so that midshipmen for many generations to come could be inspired by the worthy ideals and patriotism of Chief Tamanend of the Delawares.
- Tamanend is best known as a lover of peace and friendship, who signed a peace treaty with William Penn in 1683 that lasted for three quarters of a century. Chief Tamanend's peaceful leadership brought people together and he was endowed with every good and noble qualification.
- The Naval Academy has modified the practice of painting the only statue on campus honoring a Native American, based upon input from members of the Brigade of Midshipmen - as well as faculty, staff, and alumni - who found the practice to be inappropriate and offensive.
- The issue with painting the statue has been raised a number of times by concerned individuals to USNA leadership over the past few years. Enough individuals raised their voices that the Superintendent and members of the Senior Leadership Team reviewed the practice in depth and made this decision.
- As we would never consider painting the statues of Vice Admirals Stockdale or Lawrence, nor LtGen Lejeune, we will no longer paint the Native American statue depicting the Chief of the Delawares, nor will the granite foundation be painted.
- Out of respect for the traditional painting of the statue which occurs prior to significant Naval Academy events, a removable wooden base has been constructed and it is now painted by midshipmen in lieu of painting the actual bronze statue or granite foundation.
- The Naval Academy believes this revised practice upholds both Naval Academy tradition and shows dignity and respect to Native Americans.

Topic 3: Critical Race Theory

Key Messages and Talking Points:

- We can confirm there is no course or training taught at the Naval Academy dedicated to critical race theory, white privilege, whiteness, or anything along those lines that insist the U.S. is an inherently racist country. A vast array of intellectual ideas and approaches are mentioned in the course of a discussion in classrooms and in other settings on the Yard, but there are no related subjects in our syllabi.
- Our job here at the Naval Academy is to teach people *how* to think, not *what* to think. It is natural that social, legal, and economic considerations regarding race come up in the classroom at an undergraduate institution. We encourage these conversations because they are conversations that are occurring in contemporary society. Our midshipmen need to be able to be conversant in these topics in order to lead diverse teams in the Fleet. The key point here is that we do not require that midshipmen subscribe to certain interpretative frameworks. We want them to be critical thinkers who are able to come to

their own conclusions based on a wide variety of perspectives and narratives. We do not shy away from difficult conversations in the classroom.

- The Naval Academy focuses on respect and inclusion of people of all backgrounds in order to develop well-rounded future leaders in the Navy and Marine Corps.

Topic 4: Attrition

Key Messages and Talking Points:

- Many alumni are concerned that a decrease in attrition rates in recent USNA classes corresponds with a decrease in standards to which midshipmen are held accountable. This is simply not the case, and the decrease in attrition is due to a variety of factors.
- Decreased attrition is not attributable to lower conduct and honor separations. In fact, when comparing year groups, average conduct and honor attrition is actually higher today (2.5%) compared to the very early 2000's (1.8%).
- Lower attrition rates are primarily attributable to two factors: lower voluntary attrition and lower academic attrition.
- Voluntary attrition is the biggest difference, it has decreased from 13.2% to 4.9% over the past 20 years...and it is not because the Naval Academy is easier. Instead:
 - Today, unlike decades ago, almost every midshipman admitted to USNA visited USNA prior to their arrival; whether through Summer Seminar, Candidate Visit Weekends, or other visiting opportunities (and even studied the place on the internet). They know what they are getting into and have decided they are up for the challenge. Many midshipmen of decades ago had no idea what they were getting into and quit early on.
 - We have much better support services, ranging from the Academic Center to Midshipmen Development Center.
 - They are smarter coming in the front door. Of note, many midshipmen don't get kicked out for academics, but quit because of academics...that number has decreased.
 - There are more great opportunities that a midshipman can take advantage of during their four-year journey— many of which are supported through philanthropy— including International Programs, Experiential Leadership Development programs, extra-curricular activities, musical activities, Varsity and club sports, etc.
 - We have made a conscious effort to eliminate hazing...instead, especially during Plebe Summer and throughout Plebe year, it is now positive pressure with a purpose.
 - Air conditioning in Bancroft Hall didn't hurt.
- Academic attrition has decreased from 3.3% to 1.0%...and it isn't because it's easier.

- They are smarter coming in the front door
- The faculty and Academic Center are committed to helping midshipmen
- Project-based learning makes academics, for many, a much more rewarding experience.

Topic 5: Naming Commission

Key Messages and Talking Points:

- Formed in 2021, as mandated by the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021, the commission is establishing the criteria to rename or remove “names, symbols, displays, monuments and paraphernalia” that commemorate the Confederate States of America or any person who served voluntarily with the Confederate States of America. In addition, the commission will review any “base, installation, street, building, facility, aircraft, ship, plane, weapon, equipment or any other property owned or controlled by the Department of Defense.”
- The Naming Commission, led by Admiral (ret.) Michelle Howard (USNA ‘82), visited the Yard in August 2021. The Commission visited the three sites on the Yard named after individuals who voluntarily served in the Confederate Navy: Buchanan House and Buchanan Road (named after USNA’s first Superintendent, Franklin Buchanan), and Maury Hall (named after Matthew Maury, the preeminent Oceanographer of his time). While on the Yard, the Commission held dialogues with various groups that included midshipmen, faculty, staff, senior leaders, alumni, and members of the local community to gather better insight into the Naval Academy and our culture and history.
- The Commission's final report is due to SECDEF and Congress by 1 Oct 2022.
- Of note, the USNA Superintendent does not have the authority to name or rename buildings or roads on the Yard. That authority resides with the CNO and is not delegated.

<https://www.thenamingcommission.gov/fags>