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# **Congressional Nominations to U.S. Service Academies: An Overview and Resources for Outreach and Management**

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# Congressional Nominations to U.S. Service Academies: An Overview and Resources for Outreach and Management

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, the U.S. Naval Academy, the U.S. Air Force Academy, and the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy. The fifth service academy, the U.S. Coast Guard Academy, does not require a congressional nomination for appointment. These institutions prepare college-age Americans to be officers of the U.S. uniformed services. Upon graduation, service academy graduates are commissioned as officers in the active or reserve components of the military or merchant marine for a minimum of five years.

The nomination of constituents to one of the service academies can provide Members of Congress with the opportunity to perform community outreach and other representational duties.

In some states and congressional districts, nominations are highly competitive. Others are less competitive, and some offices do not receive expressions of interest from enough applicants to fill the number of nominations allocated. Consequently, some congressional offices might need to dedicate considerable staff resources to the selection process to identify qualified candidates, while others can incorporate service academy nominations alongside other constituent service work such as casework.

The nomination authorities, number of appointments, and criteria establishing the qualifications of potential service academy appointees are set by statute, federal regulations, and policies established by each academy. No laws or regulations govern congressional nomination processes, as long as nominations are submitted by deadlines established by the academies and comply with chamber ethics rules. Each congressional office with nominating authority may develop its own process for managing its service academy nominations. Some offices handle nominations internally, assigning the task of managing applicant files and developing nomination recommendations to a staff member. Other offices assign staff to oversee nominations-related activities but delegate the screening and development of nomination recommendations to a volunteer panel, which could be charged with screening or interviewing applicants.

This report describes statutory requirements for allocating congressional nominations to service academies. It also identifies the qualifications that must be met by potential nominees, as established by statute and each academy. Finally, sample documents that could be used by congressional offices at various stages of the nomination selection process are included. These documents provide basic information and can be customized to fit the specific needs of individual office policies.

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December 18, 2019

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Members of Congress are authorized by law to nominate candidates for appointment to four U.S. service academies.<sup>1</sup> These schools are the U.S. Military Academy (USMA), West Point, NY; the U.S. Naval Academy (USNA), Annapolis, MD; the U.S. Air Force Academy (USAFA), Colorado Springs, CO; and the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy (USMMA), Kings Point, NY. The fifth service academy, the U.S. Coast Guard Academy (USCGA), New London, CT, does not require a congressional nomination for appointment. These institutions provide college-age Americans with a tuition-free,<sup>2</sup> four-year undergraduate education and prepare them to be officers of some of the U.S. uniformed services.<sup>3</sup> Upon graduation, service academy graduates are commissioned as officers in the active or reserve components of the military or the merchant marine for a minimum of five years.

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. In addition to securing a nomination, a candidate must also submit an application packet and fulfill other service academy requirements, some of which are described in the "Applicant Qualifications" section of this report. 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.<sup>4</sup>

The nomination of constituents to one of the service academies can provide Members of Congress with the opportunity to perform community outreach and other representational activities. In some states and congressional districts, nominations are highly competitive. Others are less competitive, and some offices do not receive expressions of interest from enough applicants to fill the number of nominations allocated. Consequently, some congressional offices may need to dedicate considerable staff resources to the selection process to identify qualified candidates, while others can incorporate service academy nominations alongside other constituent service activities such as casework.<sup>5</sup>

## Congressional Approaches

The nomination authorities, number of appointments, and criteria establishing the qualifications of potential service academy appointees are set in statute, federal regulations, and policies established by each academy. No laws or regulations govern congressional nomination processes,

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<sup>1</sup> Historical records indicate that the congressional nomination served to help democratize and diversify the ranks of military officers. Congressional nominations ensured that academy appointees represented all geographic areas of the United States, came from a diverse set of family backgrounds, and would not be subject to executive branch political patronage. See U.S. Congress, House Committee on Military Affairs, *Military Academy*, report to accompany Bill H.R. No. 367, 28<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., May 15, 1844, Rep. No. 476, pp. 14-16; U.S. Congress, House Committee on Military Affairs, *West Point Academy*, report to accompany Bill H.R. No. 444, 29<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., May 11, 1846, Rep. No. 660, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> While tuition is covered for all students in service academies, some academies may require students to pay fees for some services and activities. See USMMA, "Cost of Attendance," <https://www.usmma.edu/admissions/financial-aid/cost-attendance>.

<sup>3</sup> This report does not discuss admission to the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences (<http://www.usuhs.mil/>), which provides graduate education in medicine, nursing, and other health fields for members of the military, and the United States Public Health Service (<http://www.usphs.gov/>), for which no congressional nominations are required for admission.

<sup>4</sup> Based on admissions data for the class of 2019 from USMA, USNA, USAFA, and USMMA, available on the academies' websites, about 50% of qualified applicants were granted academy appointments.

<sup>5</sup> See CRS Report RL33209, *Casework in a Congressional Office: Background, Rules, Laws, and Resources*, by R. Eric Petersen and Sarah J. Eckman.

as long as nominations are submitted by deadlines established by the academies,<sup>6</sup> provide the information requested in the format required by the academies,<sup>7</sup> and comply with chamber ethics rules. Each congressional office with nominating authority has the opportunity to develop its own process for managing its service academy nominations. Some congressional offices have adapted and modified a “whole person” approach similar to that used by USMA, USNA, and USAFA to make their nomination decisions. This approach evaluates several broad components of a potential nominee’s qualifications for appointment, including character, scholarship, leadership, physical aptitude, medical fitness, and motivation. Other congressional offices reach decisions through the consideration of a candidate’s academic preparation, extracurricular participation, community service, and the recommendations of those familiar with their activities in those areas. To make these assessments, congressional offices often require prospective nominees to submit an application packet, which can be a combination of self-reported qualifications and additional documentation materials.

In addition to establishing criteria for nomination decisions, each congressional Member office may determine how to administer the decision-making process. Some offices handle nominations internally, assigning the task of managing applicant files and developing nomination recommendations to a staff member. Other offices assign staff to oversee nomination-related activities but delegate the screening and development of nomination recommendations to a volunteer panel, which could be charged with screening or interviewing applicants. A nominations review panel could include educators, service academy alumni, representatives of veterans’ groups, and other community leaders from a Member’s state or district. The decision to employ one approach or another could be based on the number of nomination applications received, the volume of other activity in a congressional office, the availability of qualified volunteers to sit on a nominations board, and other specific considerations related to individual states and congressional districts. The use of volunteers in congressional offices is governed by regulations issued by the Select Committee on Ethics in the Senate<sup>8</sup> and by the Committees on House Administration and Ethics in the House.<sup>9</sup>

It is common for Member offices to devote a page on their official websites to the service academy nomination process. This web page can be used to explain the office’s particular nomination process, provide application materials, announce deadlines, refer prospective nominees to service academy liaisons or websites, share information about past and/or present service academy nominees, or for other purposes. Many offices encourage digital delivery of all

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<sup>6</sup> Typically, January 31 is the final deadline for service academies to receive congressional nominations, but the academies may also choose to change this deadline for subsequent application cycles. Some academies also have early action deadlines or rolling admissions deadlines during the fall that congressional Member offices should also be mindful of. Information on these other deadlines can be requested from the academies’ admissions offices.

<sup>7</sup> Each service academy requires that Member offices submit their nominations online through a designated website portal run by the academy’s admissions office. A congressional office may have to request access to the service academy’s nomination portal from the academy’s admissions office. Through these academy portals, Member offices are able to obtain real-time information about applicants from their districts, and applicants are also able to view the status and source(s) of their academy nomination(s).

<sup>8</sup> U.S. Congress, Senate, Select Committee on Ethics, *Senate Ethics Manual*, S. Pub. 108-1, 108<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess. (Washington: GPO, 2003), pp. 113-115. The document is available on the web at <http://ethics.senate.gov/downloads/pdffiles/manual.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> U.S. Congress, House, Committee on House Administration, *Member’s Congressional Handbook*, <http://cha.house.gov/handbooks/members-congressional-handbook#Members-Handbook-Staff-Volunteers>; and U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Standards of Official Conduct, *House Ethics Manual*, 110<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess. (Washington: GPO, 2008), pp. 284-291.

or part of the nominee's application, and some Member offices provide forms on their websites for nomination requests.

The service academies also offer guidance and support for congressional Member offices regarding the nomination and appointment process. Coordination with the service academies may help Members of Congress assist constituents throughout the appointment process. The service academies, for example, may be able to help identify prospective nominees or academy alumni, and clarify institutional policies. The service academies also encourage congressional Member offices to host Academy Days in their districts, which are informational sessions for prospective nominees, similar to college admissions fairs. When possible, each service academy will send currently enrolled cadets or midshipmen (often from a Member's state/district) and/or admissions officers to these events. The service academies can also publicize Academy Days or other congressional events on their websites.<sup>10</sup>

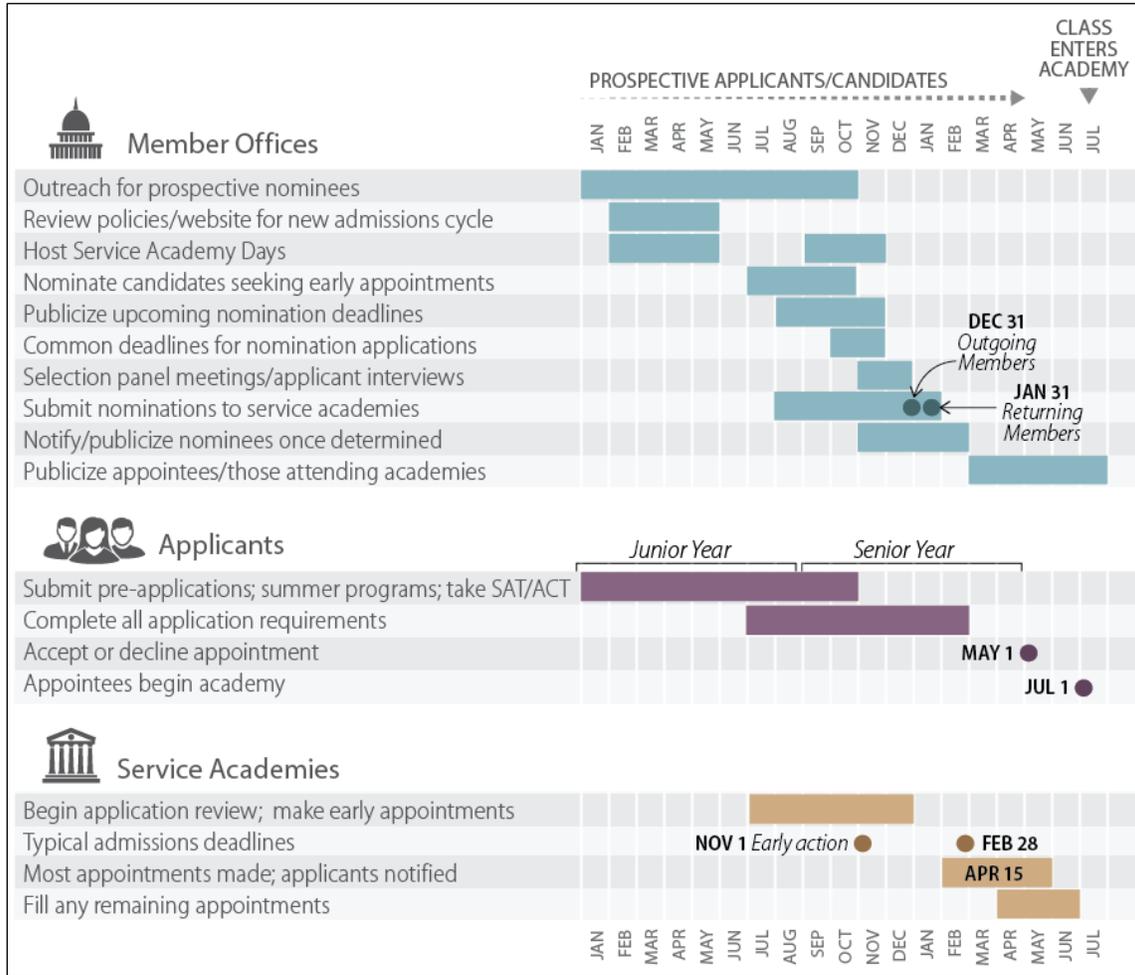
Statutory requirements regarding allocations of congressional nominations to service academies are described in the next section. A subsequent section describes qualifications of potential nominees to service academies established by statute, federal regulations, and each academy. **Figure 1** provides a generalized timeline of the application process for applicants, service academies, and congressional offices, which may be a helpful reference for offices that are creating or revising their nomination procedures. Appendixes to the report include sample documents that may be used by congressional offices at various stages of the nomination selection process. These documents, which are based on information and examples found on service academy and congressional websites, provide basic information and can be customized to fit the specific needs of individual office policies. The documents include

- an initial contact letter that a congressional office could send to high schools in its state or district,
- an information sheet and application that could be sent to those potential applicants who respond to the contact letter or contact a congressional office on their own initiative,
- an instruction sheet for preparing an application for congressional nomination,
- an application for congressional nomination, and
- a follow-up letter to send to applicants once their nomination has been submitted.

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<sup>10</sup> Websites for the admissions office in each academy are listed in **Table 3** of this report, and the service academies also employ congressional liaisons and regional admissions officers who can assist congressional Member offices.

**Figure I. General Timelines for Service Academy Nomination Application, and Appointment Processes**



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

**Notes:** This figure illustrates the typical events and activities congressional offices, applicants, and the service academies might undertake in the 18 months prior to the intake of a new academy class. Bars represent generalized information, representing when these events most frequently occur. Circles represent specific dates in the process. Many applicants undertake this process during high school, during the grade levels corresponding with “Junior Year” and “Senior Year,” however, some applicants may not be current high school students. For more guidance, contact the service academies’ admissions offices.

## Appointment Criteria

Appointment and nomination criteria are established by statute, by regulations issued by the appropriate executive branch authority, and by policies set by each academy. Three service academies, USMA, USNA, and USAFA, are housed in the military branches of the Department of Defense (DOD). USMMA is governed by regulations issued by the Department of Transportation. USCGA, which does not require a congressional nomination for admission, is an organizational unit of the Department of Homeland Security.

## Department of Defense Academies

Three service academies, USMA, USNA, and USAFA, are overseen by the three military branches of the DOD. Allocations for nomination by Members of Congress of prospective appointees to these academies are established by statute and are substantially similar for each academy.<sup>11</sup> The number of positions, or charges,<sup>12</sup> subject to congressional nomination at each DOD academy includes

- 10 from each state, 5 of whom are nominated by each Senator from that state;
- 5 from each congressional district, nominated by the Representative from the district;
- 5 from the District of Columbia, nominated by the Delegate from the District of Columbia;
- 4 from the U.S. Virgin Islands, nominated by the Delegate from the U.S. Virgin Islands;
- 5 from Puerto Rico, nominated by the Resident Commissioner from Puerto Rico;
- 4 from Guam, nominated by the Delegate from Guam;
- 3 from American Samoa, nominated by the Delegate from American Samoa; and
- 3 from the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, nominated by the Delegate from the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

When a congressionally-nominated academy position is vacant, a Member of Congress may nominate 10 persons for possible appointment. As DOD service academy cadets or midshipmen who received a congressional nomination graduate, or as their appointments are otherwise terminated, a nominating Member office can make new nominations to fill any vacated positions. Typically, one appointment per DOD academy per Senator and Representative is available annually. In some years, however, a congressional office might have the opportunity to make nominations to fill multiple vacancies at an academy.<sup>13</sup> Appointments made by a predecessor are considered part of the quota of a newly elected Member. Appointments made for candidates whose Representative changes as a result of legislative redistricting are considered as part of the new Member's allocation.<sup>14</sup> The service academies can provide congressional offices with information about the number of appointments available for Members to nominate.

Nominees may be submitted in three categories: without ranking, with a principal candidate and nine ranked alternates, or with a principal candidate and nine unranked alternates.<sup>15</sup> When the Member specifies a principal candidate, that individual will be appointed to a DOD academy as long as he or she meets all other admission criteria.<sup>16</sup> If the principal candidate is disqualified, the

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<sup>11</sup> Appointment, number, and territorial distribution information are codified at 10 U.S.C. 9442, USAFA; 10 U.S.C. 8454, USNA; and 10 U.S.C. 7442, USMA.

<sup>12</sup> This reflects language used in statute and often by the service academies. Once an individual receives an appointment, he or she is "charged" to a nominating authority. The cadets or midshipmen whose nominations came from a congressional office are sometimes referred to as the Member's "charges."

<sup>13</sup> Nominations are attached to a particular vacancy, so if a congressional office has multiple appointments available to an academy in a given year, a set of nominations is submitted for each vacancy.

<sup>14</sup> 10 U.S.C. 9447, USAFA; 10 U.S.C. 7447, USMA; 10 U.S.C. 8455, USNA.

<sup>15</sup> No publicly available data regarding the number of offices that choose ranked or unranked options were identified.

<sup>16</sup> 32 C.F.R. 901.27, USAFA; 32 C.F.R. 575.3(a)(2), USMA. There is no similar C.F.R. language for USNA, however, admissions officials at USNA indicate that this practice is also typically followed.

service academies will appoint the first fully qualified, ranked alternate, if specified by the Member. In circumstances where Members do not specify a principal candidate or ranked alternates, one individual from among the Member's nominees who is found to be fully qualified will be appointed by the academies to serve as a cadet or midshipman.

Congressional nominees who are not initially offered appointments and are designated by the academies as qualified alternates may receive an appointment via a noncongressional appointment authority. Nominees who are not initially offered academy appointments may also be offered admission to an academy preparatory program.<sup>17</sup> Noncongressional appointees from a Member's state or district are not counted as part of the Member of Congress's statutory allotment of appointees, nor are students appointed to an academy prep school. Nominations are only valid for the admissions cycle in which they were submitted: if an applicant reapplies during a subsequent year, a new nomination is required.

## **Noncongressional DOD Service Academy Nominations and Appointments**

Although congressional offices provide most of the nominations to the DOD service academies each year, other nomination authorities exist. 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.<sup>18</sup> Vice presidential nominations are made for the nation at large, and applicants may apply for those through the White House website,<sup>19</sup> with supporting materials submitted through each DOD service academy. The governor of Puerto Rico may also nominate a candidate to each academy who is a native of Puerto Rico.

Other nomination and appointment sources are only available to those with a military service-connection. The President makes nominations for children of career military personnel and can appoint an unlimited number for children of Medal of Honor recipients. Children of armed forces personnel who were killed in action, who are missing in action,<sup>20</sup> or who had or have a 100% service-connected disability contracted in active service may also seek merit-based appointments, as determined by competitive examinations. The service secretaries can nominate individuals who serve as enlisted members of the regular and reserve components of their respective military branches, as well as participants in the reserve officer training corps of the service they oversee. The superintendents of the academies are also granted the authority to make a limited number of nominations for appointments each year, as well as the ability to nominate additional qualified candidates for the purposes of filling the class. The distribution of nominations by noncongressional authorities is listed in **Table 1**.

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.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> These are one-year programs, hosted at other military schools. Students who complete the preparatory program can matriculate into the service academies but need to reapply to the academy during the appropriate admissions cycle.

<sup>18</sup> If the vice presidency is vacant, then the President pro tempore of the Senate makes those nominations.

<sup>19</sup> See "Service Academy Nomination Process," at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/administration/vice-president-pence/academy-nominations>.

<sup>20</sup> This also applies to children of federal civilian employees in missing status.

<sup>21</sup> 10 U.S.C. 9441a, USAFA; 10 U.S.C. 7441a, USMA; 10 U.S.C. 8453, USNA.

**Table I. Distribution of Non-Congressional Nominations to Department of Defense Service Academies, by Authority**

Nominating Authority	Number and Type
President <sup>a</sup>	One hundred children of members of the Armed Forces who have eight years of continuous active service or are credited with eight years of reserve duty service, retirement status, or who are deceased with one of those statuses.  The President is also authorized to appoint an unlimited number of children whose parents have been awarded the Medal of Honor.
Vice President <sup>b</sup>	Five, at large.
Service Secretary <sup>c</sup>	Eighty-five enlisted members of the regular service of the branch led by the Secretary. Eighty-five enlisted members of the reserve components of the branch led by the Secretary.  Twenty honor graduates of schools designated as honor schools by any military branch, and from members of the Secretary's service Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC). One hundred-fifty qualified alternates who received congressional nominations but were not appointed in order of merit.
Service Academy Superintendent	Fifty, at large.  Sixty-five 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. 9442, USAFA; 10 U.S.C. 8454, USNA; and 10 U.S.C. 7442, USMA.

**Notes:** These nomination authorities apply to nominations for appointment to USMA, USNA, and USAFA. They do not apply to nominations for appointment to USMMA, which has no noncongressional nominations, or the USCGA, which requires does not require nominations.

- a. In his capacity as commander in chief of the military, the President is the appointing authority for all service academy admissions.
- b. If there is no Vice President, then the President Pro Tempore of the Senate makes those nominations.
- c. The service secretary for USMA is the Secretary of the Army; USNA, Secretary of the Navy; and USAFA, Secretary of the Air Force. In addition to their numerical categorical nominating authority, military branch secretaries are also authorized, when the annual quota of cadets or midshipmen is not met, to nominate any qualified applicant who did not receive a nomination from any other source.

## United States Merchant Marine Academy

Members of Congress nominate individuals for appointment to USMMA. The number of seats in an entering class at this service academy is allocated by regulation issued by the Secretary of Transportation, who is also the appointment authority for the academy. Each state's allocated number of seats is determined proportionally to its representation in Congress.<sup>22</sup> Under the regulation, each Senator, Representative, Delegate, and the Resident Commissioner from Puerto Rico may nominate 10 candidates per vacancy to compete for admission to the academy. Members of the House of Representatives may nominate candidates from anywhere within their state, even if the candidate resides outside of the Representative's district.<sup>23</sup> The regulation allocates four vacancies to nominees from the District of Columbia and one vacancy each to

<sup>22</sup> 46 U.S.C. 51302.

<sup>23</sup> 46 U.S.C. 51302(b)(2); 46 C.F.R. 310.53.

nominees from Puerto Rico, Guam, Northern Mariana Islands, U.S. Virgin Islands, and American Samoa. The allocation of positions by state and territory is listed in **Table 2**. The regulation states that nominating officials may select individuals for nomination by any method they wish, including a screening examination.<sup>24</sup>

**Table 2. Distribution of Seats Available for Congressional Nomination to the United States Merchant Marine Academy, by State**

State	Seats	State	Seats	State	Seats
Alabama	4	Kentucky	2	Ohio	8
Alaska	1	Louisiana	4	Oklahoma	2
American Samoa	1	Maine	2	Oregon	3
Arizona	3	Maryland	5	Pennsylvania	10
Arkansas	2	Massachusetts	5	Puerto Rico	1
California	19	Michigan	7	Rhode Island	2
Colorado	4	Minnesota	3	South Carolina	4
Connecticut	4	Mississippi	3	South Dakota	1
Delaware	1	Missouri	3	Tennessee	4
District of Columbia	4	Montana	2	Texas	13
Florida	10	Nebraska	2	Utah	2
Georgia	5	Nevada	2	Vermont	1
Guam	1	New Hampshire	2	U.S. Virgin Islands	1
Hawaii	2	New Jersey	6	Virginia	5
Idaho	2	New Mexico	2	Washington	5
Illinois	9	New York	15	West Virginia	2
Indiana	3	North Carolina	6	Wisconsin	4
Iowa	4	North Dakota	1	Wyoming	1
Kansas	3	Northern Mariana Islands	1		

Source: 46 U.S.C. 51302; 46 C.F.R. 310.53.

## United States Coast Guard Academy

Procedures for appointments to USCGA are established by regulations issued by the Secretary of Homeland Security.<sup>25</sup> Additional qualifications may be set by the superintendent of USCGA, who is responsible for appointments to the academy.<sup>26</sup> No congressional nomination is required for admission to this service academy.

<sup>24</sup> 46 C.F.R. 310.53. There are no presidential, vice presidential, or service-connected nominations to USMMA. The superintendent of USMMA, however, may appoint up to 40 students.

<sup>25</sup> 14 U.S.C. §§1921, 503.

<sup>26</sup> 33 C.F.R. §40.1.

## Applicant Qualifications

To qualify for an appointment to any service academy, an applicant must meet the following criteria:<sup>27</sup>

- be a U.S. citizen or national;
- be at least 17 years of age and not yet 23 years old on July 1 of the year the applicant would enter an academy (25 years old for USMMA);
- be unmarried;
- be 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 the ACT Assessment (ACT);
- be in good physical and mental health;
- pass a comprehensive medical examination; and
- pass a physical aptitude examination.

Beyond what is written in federal law and regulation, each academy can further specify academic, physical, and leadership requirements for admission. These requirements vary by academy and are revised regularly.<sup>28</sup> In preparation for making appointments, a congressional office might review each academy's most recent class profile for specific information on test scores, class rankings, and activities of recently admitted students. Some of this information is available on the academies' websites.<sup>29</sup>

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. Each academy requires the submission of a preliminary application to initiate the admissions process. Preliminary application materials are available from the academies' websites listed in **Table 3**. Acceptance of a service academy appointment requires at least a nine-year service obligation, including four years at an academy and five years of active duty service.

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<sup>27</sup> 10 U.S.C. §9446, 32 C.F.R. §901, USAFA; 10 U.S.C. §7446, 32 C.F.R. §575, USMA; 10 U.S.C. §8458, 46 C.F.R. §310, USNA; 46 C.F.R. §310.54, USMMA; 33 C.F.R. §40.1. For the DOD academies, see also Department of Defense Instruction 3122.22, September 24, 2015, at <https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/DD/issuances/dodi/132222p.pdf>.

<sup>28</sup> The extent and nature of recommended high school preparation varies by academy. Detailed preparation and admissions information is available from each academy's website: USMA <https://www.usmma.edu/node/8266>; USNA <http://www.usna.edu/Admissions/faq.htm>; USAFA <http://www.academyadmissions.com/admissions/advice-to-applicants/all-applicants/academic-preparation/>; and USMMA <http://www.usmma.edu/admissions/application/scholastic-requirements>.

<sup>29</sup> USMA <https://www.usma.edu/admissions/sitepages/class%20profiles.aspx>; USNA [http://www.usna.edu/Admissions/\\_files/documents/ClassPortrait.pdf](http://www.usna.edu/Admissions/_files/documents/ClassPortrait.pdf); USAFA <http://www.academyadmissions.com/admissions/advice-to-applicants/all-applicants>; USMMA <http://www.usmma.edu/class-profile>. Current class profile information is not available from the U.S. Coast Guard Academy.

**Table 3. Websites for Preliminary Application to United States Service Academies**

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U.S. Military Academy	<a href="https://westpoint.edu/admissions">https://westpoint.edu/admissions</a>
U.S. Naval Academy	<a href="https://www.usna.edu/admissions">https://www.usna.edu/admissions</a>
U.S. Air Force Academy	<a href="https://academyadmissions.com">https://academyadmissions.com</a>
U.S. Merchant Marine Academy	<a href="https://www.usmma.edu/admissions">https://www.usmma.edu/admissions</a>
U.S. Coast Guard Academy <sup>a</sup>	<a href="https://www.cga.edu/apply">https://www.cga.edu/apply</a>

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**Source:** CRS compilation.

- a. The United States Coast Guard Academy does not require congressional nominations.

## Appendix A. Sample Initial Contact Letter<sup>30</sup>

Dear High School Senior:

One of my favorite duties as a Member of Congress is nominating **[state's/town's/district's]** best and brightest young men and women to our nation's service academies. If you are a highly motivated, well-rounded, successful student, I invite you to consider the unique opportunity to develop physically, ethically, and intellectually while building a foundation for an exciting, challenging, and rewarding career as a military officer in the service of our nation. **[State/Town/District]**-area students traditionally are very successful at the academies, and I'm pleased to do my part to ensure that the community continues to provide some of the next generation's outstanding military leaders.

A congressional nomination is required for students wishing to enter the U.S. Military Academy, West Point, NY; the U.S. Naval Academy, Annapolis, MD; the U.S. Air Force Academy, Colorado Springs, CO; and the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy, Kings Point, NY. Successful applicants will have a broad academic background, the ability to pass a physical aptitude test, and strong leadership potential. An applicant must also be a U.S. citizen, a high school graduate between the ages of 17 and 23, unmarried, have no dependents, and be of high moral character. Acceptance of a service academy appointment requires at least a nine-year service obligation, including four years at an academy and five years of active duty service.

If you are interested in being considered for a service academy nomination, you must apply to me at my office by **[date]** to be considered for the class entering the service academies in July, **[year]**. Please contact my **[Washington/district/state]** office, at **[phone/e-mail/address]**, for further information and to request a nomination application.

Thank you for your interest in the service academies.

Sincerely,

**[Member]**

United States **[Representative/Senator]**

<sup>30</sup> This is a sample document and is not intended to be definitive. It is based on information and examples found on service academy and congressional websites. Any information may be deleted or modified as appropriate to individual Member office policies and procedures.

## Appendix B. Sample Information Sheet<sup>31</sup>

### [Representative/Senator]

Service Academy Nomination Procedure and Basic Fact Sheet for [year] Admission

An appointment to the U.S. Military Academy, U.S. Naval Academy, U.S. Air Force Academy, or U.S. Merchant Marine Academy is a distinct and rare honor. Acceptance of an academy appointment requires at least a nine-year service obligation, including four years at an academy and five years of active duty service.

**Eligibility.** To be eligible for appointment, you must be an American citizen, at least 17 years old and not yet 23 years old on July 1 of the year you enter an academy (25 years old for United States Merchant Marine Academy). Further, you must not be married or pregnant, and you must not have any legal obligation to support children or other dependents. To apply for a nomination through my office, you must also be a legal resident of [state/district]. If you are not certain that your legal domicile is in the [state/district], call my office and request address verification.<sup>32</sup>

**Nomination.** The nomination process is very competitive. I urge you to apply for a nomination from me as well as [Representative and Senator/Senators] from our state who can nominate qualified applicants to the four service academies. If you are interested in attending the U.S. Military Academy, U.S. Naval Academy, and U.S. Air Force Academy, you may also qualify for nomination through other sources, including

- President Donald J. Trump, who nominates children of career military personnel, deceased or disabled veterans, military or civilian personnel in missing status, and Medal of Honor recipients;
- Vice President Michael R. Pence, who nominates five individuals from across the United States per year; and
- The Secretary of the Army, Navy, or Air Force, who nominates members of regular military, reserve components, and participants in the ROTC.

Further information regarding application procedures for these nominations is available through each academy's website, listed below. Applying for more than one nomination could increase your chances of securing a nomination. More than one nomination, however, is not required to gain an appointment. If someone else nominates you, please notify me so that I may allow other candidates the opportunity for nomination.

**Evaluation Criteria.** The academies consider evidence of character, scholarship, leadership, physical aptitude, medical fitness, personal goals, and motivation in performing each nominee's "whole-person" evaluation. These are also the criteria I use to determine nominations. Specific criteria in the "whole person" evaluation include character, scholarship, leadership, physical aptitude, medical fitness, and motivation.

**Character.** Absolutely critical in the course of evaluating a candidate is a positive determination of the candidate's character. Absence of good moral character is cause for disqualification. Candidates are considered to have good moral character unless evidence exists to suggest otherwise.

**Scholarship.** Each element of a candidate's academic record is carefully evaluated by a service academy's admissions board. The elements evaluated include a complete high school record (and college record, when applicable), class standing, and either the SAT or ACT scores. All strengths and weaknesses in a candidate's academic background are taken into account.

**Leadership.** Participation and achievement in organized athletics, student body and class government, clubs and class extracurricular activities, scouting, boys or girls state, and church or other community-related activities demonstrate evidence of leadership potential. Candidates who have found it necessary to work to provide family support are considered to have demonstrated desirable leadership potential.

**Physical Aptitude.** Measuring strength, endurance, agility, and coordination, the academies' fitness tests are designed to determine each candidate's readiness to undertake the rigorous athletic and physical education program at one of the academies. Each academy has its own test requirements. Results of the examination are evaluated, assigned a numerical score, and included in the whole-person evaluation by West Point. The Air Force, Naval, and Merchant Marine academies evaluate the results on a pass-or-fail basis.

**Medical Fitness.** A candidate who meets minimum scholastic standards will be scheduled to take a service academy qualifying medical examination at a military or civilian contract facility near the candidate's home. Although medical

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<sup>32</sup> An applicant to the USMMA can reside outside of a House Member's district, as long as the applicant lives within the state that the Member represents.

qualification standards vary among the academies, only one exam is required. Different tests may be necessary, however, depending upon the academy. Scheduling and evaluation of the exam are arranged by the Department of Defense Medical Examination Review Board (DODMERB). Candidates who have questions about their medical exam results should direct them to:

DODMERB  
8034 Edgerton Drive  
Suite 132  
USAF Academy, Colorado 80840-2200  
#redacted#

Medical scheduling and evaluation are time-consuming processes, especially if consultation, re-testing, or corrective action is required. The process may take from six weeks to four months.

**Motivation.** Motivation is an intangible quality and difficult to evaluate; however, since it is most frequently the factor that determines an appointee's success or failure at a service academy, I make every effort to gauge a candidate's motivation. An attempt to measure motivation may be made through observation of the candidate's interest level in attending an academy and serving as an officer in the armed forces. Motivation may also be measured through an evaluation of correspondence, personal contacts, and care with which application materials are prepared.

#### **Applicant Evaluation by Service Academies**

Each academy uses a questionnaire to make an initial assessment of an applicant's potential for appointment. The results of this evaluation are provided by each academy to Members of Congress to assist them in screening their applicants. Soon after the applicant returns the questionnaire, the admissions office will provide the applicant with an evaluation of the applicant's demonstrated ability to meet admissions standards. An applicant who meets the standards is declared a candidate; those who do not meet the standards at that point may later submit additional test scores or information to the academy for re-evaluation. The applicant must provide the following information: academic standardized test scores (SAT, ACT), rank in class and grade point average, Social Security number, and participation in high school extracurricular activities. Be sure to complete a pre-candidate questionnaire for each academy in which you are interested.

Service academy websites are:

Military Academy	<a href="https://www.usma.edu">https://www.usma.edu</a>
Naval Academy	<a href="https://www.usna.edu/homepage.php">https://www.usna.edu/homepage.php</a>
Air Force Academy	<a href="https://www.usafa.edu">https://www.usafa.edu</a>
Merchant Marine Academy	<a href="https://www.usmma.edu">https://www.usmma.edu</a>

#### **Contact Information**

Address correspondence regarding your application for a nomination to

**[Member]**  
**[Address]**  
**[Telephone]**  
**[E-mail]**

#### **Deadline**

**[Date]** is the deadline for applications.

## Appendix C. Sample Application Information<sup>33</sup>

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

Each year, **[Representative/Senator]** receives many inquiries from **[District/State]** students who wish to attend a military service academy. One of the application requirements of all of the United States service academies (except for the United States Coast Guard Academy) is nomination by a government official. The nominating official is usually a Member of Congress. The military service academies (Army, Navy and Air Force) also accept nominations from other government officials. If you are interested in attending one of these academies, I urge you to apply for a nomination from me as well as the other nomination sources:

- **[Appropriate Representative/Senator(s)];**
- President Donald J. Trump, who nominates children of career military personnel; deceased or disabled veterans; military or civilian personnel in missing status; and Medal of Honor recipients;
- Vice President Michael R. Pence, who nominates five individuals from across the United States per year; and
- The Secretary of the Army, Navy, or Air Force, who nominates members of regular military, reserve components, and participants in the ROTC.

Information regarding application procedures for these nominations is available through each academy's website, listed below. Applying for more than one nomination increases your chances of securing a nomination. More than one nomination, however, is neither required nor of assistance in gaining an appointment. If another authority nominates you, please notify me so that I may allow other candidates the opportunity for nomination.

Please note that the United States Merchant Marine Academy only accepts congressional nominations.

Candidates for a service academy nomination should recognize that each academy has specific deadlines which must be met if an application is to be successful. Academy websites provide information about deadlines and other application requirements. Also please note that **[Congressman/Senator]** generally considers applications only from **[District/State]** residents and children of **[District/State]** residents.

Here are the steps to follow in seeking a nomination from **[Representative/Senator]** to the service academies:

Contact **[Representative/Senator]** in writing at **[his/her]** **[Washington/district/state]** office, expressing your interest in receiving a nomination to one or more of the academies. Your letter should include your

- name;
- permanent mailing address;
- telephone number;
- temporary mailing address, if applicable;
- high school; and
- year of graduation

A nomination is only one of the requirements for matriculation at one of our nation's service academies. You must also apply directly to each service academy individually. At the same time you contact this office, you should also request admissions information from each academy to which you plan to apply, by writing to them at the following addresses:

United States Naval Academy  
USNA Candidate Guidance Office  
Annapolis, MD 21402-5018  
<https://www.usna.edu/Admissions>

United States Air Force Academy  
Admissions Office  
USAF Academy, CO 80840-5025  
<https://academyadmissions.com>

United States Military Academy  
Admissions Office

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600 Thayer Road  
West Point, NY 10996-9902  
<https://westpoint.edu/admissions>

United States Merchant Marine Academy  
Office of Admissions  
Kings Point, NY 11024-1699  
<https://www.usmma.edu/admissions>

To be considered for nomination, you will need to submit the following to **[Representative's/Senator's]** **[Washington/district/state]** office in order to complete your nomination file:

- a nomination application
- a copy of your high school transcripts, including your GPA, the size of your class, and your ranking within that class
- an official copy of your SAT or ACT scores
- 3 letters of recommendation: one from a teacher, principal, or guidance counselor; one from an employer, coach, or extracurricular faculty advisor; and one from any person of your choice who is not related to you.

Please forward the requested information at your earliest convenience. We do ask that you submit information as you compile it, instead of waiting until you have everything together.

The deadline for submission of all required documentation is **[date]**.

Please contact **[Member staff]** in the **[Washington/district/state]** office at **[phone/e-mail]** if you have any questions or if **[he/she]** can be of assistance in any way during this process.

Applying for Admission to the United States Coast Guard Academy

As noted above, the Coast Guard Academy (USCGA) is the only United States service academy that does not require a nomination for appointment. For information about the USCGA, you may write to:

United States Coast Guard Academy  
Admissions Office  
New London, CT 06320  
<https://www.uscga.edu/admissions/>

## Appendix D. Sample Nomination Application<sup>34</sup>

**[Representative/Senator]**

APPLICATION FOR NOMINATION FOR APPOINTMENT TO THE UNITED STATES SERVICE ACADEMIES

Please complete and return this form. Type or print neatly. Fill out all information completely. Any missing information may adversely affect your chances for nomination.

Full Name (Last, First, Middle)

Date of Birth

Place of Birth

Permanent Mailing Address (Number, Street, City, State, and Zip)

Phone Number

Temporary Address (If different from above)

Social Security Number

Mother's/Father's/Legal Guardian's Name (Address if different from above)

School Principal or Academic Dean Date of Graduation

Names and Addresses of all High Schools and/or Colleges Attended

Month and year of graduation

Month and year you are requesting nomination

Are you a United States citizen? (Please circle) Yes No

Are you a **[State/District]** Resident? Yes No

If not, please state connection:

Which of the academies are you interested in attending? Please number according to your preference. You will be

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considered only for those academies for which you have indicated an interest, and in the order in which you have ranked them below.

AIR FORCE \_\_\_ MERCHANT MARINE \_\_\_ NAVAL \_\_\_ MILITARY \_\_\_

Have you requested that a pre-candidate file be initiated for you at any of the academies?  
If so, which one(s)?

**ACADEMIC HISTORY AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

Latest cumulative grade point average: \_\_\_ on a scale of \_\_\_

Rank in class: \_\_\_ in a class of \_\_\_ (# of students) as of \_\_\_ (date)

**SAT Scores**

Date(s) Taken	Evidence-Based Reading and Writing	Math	SAT Essay
---------------	------------------------------------	------	-----------

**ACT Scores**

Date(s) Taken	English	Mathematics	Reading	Science	Composite
---------------	---------	-------------	---------	---------	-----------

You do not need to take both tests, but you must provide official copies of either your SAT or ACT scores. If you have already taken either examination, you should contact the College Entrance Examination Board for SAT scores, or ACT for ACT scores, and request that a copy of your scores be sent directly to **[congressional office code assigned by each group]**. If you have not yet taken these examinations, please list **[congressional office code assigned by each group]** as one of the recipients of your scores at that time.

Please answer all questions completely (use another sheet of paper if necessary):

AWARDS AND HONORS (be specific):

SCHOOL RELATED EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES (Please indicate years of participation. 1=Ninth Grade, 2=Sophomore, 3=Junior, 4=Senior):

COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES (please indicate duration and hours per week):

WORK EXPERIENCE (please indicate duration and hours per week):

MILITARY EXPERIENCE (e.g. JROTC or Civil Air Patrol):

In a one-page essay on a separate sheet, describe why you wish to attend a service academy.

If you feel that there are special conditions or circumstances that we should take into consideration, please elaborate briefly (e.g. an extremely difficult course load, a traumatic event that affected your performance).

## Appendix E. Sample Post-Nomination Letter<sup>35</sup>

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

I have reviewed your request for a nomination to **[Service Academy]**, and I am pleased to inform you that I have nominated you for an appointment to join the Class of **[Presumed College Graduation Year]**. Your achievements are impressive, and I am proud to know of a young **[man/woman]** with such remarkable leadership abilities, scholastic aptitude, and extracurricular talents in our **[district/state]**.

I sincerely hope that you will soon receive an official appointment letter from **[Service Academy]**, but I must remind you that my nomination does not guarantee your acceptance into the academy. Competition for these appointments can be stiff, and each year, many well-deserving, fully-qualified candidates are unfortunately not accepted. This decision is ultimately made by the admissions officers at **[Service Academy]**. Please make sure you have fully completed their admissions requirements and be in touch with **[Service Academy]** to check on the overall status of your potential appointment.

Again, I would like to congratulate you on your nomination to **[Service Academy]**. You have worked hard to get to this point, and it is well-deserved. I look forward to hearing about your many future accomplishments in the years to come. If my office can be of any further assistance, please be in contact with us.

### Author Contact Information

R. Eric Petersen  
Specialist in American National Government  
#redacted#@crs.loc.gov7-....

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#redacted#@crs.loc.gov7-....

<sup>35</sup> This is a sample document and is not intended to be definitive. Any information may be deleted or modified as appropriate to individual Member office policies and procedures, or to the recipient of this letter. The first paragraph, in particular, can be customized to include the particular activities or achievements of the nominee.

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