

The Georgia Military College

Core Values: Duty, Honor, and Country

Elevating student character and developing student intellect are the two fundamental components of our College purpose. Because developing the character of our students is so important, the College expects that staff and faculty members will see every interaction with students as an opportunity to teach students that it is important to develop and practice good habits of character over a lifetime. With that end in mind, the following essay on the Georgia Military College (GMC) Core Values is presented to give everyone a starting point around which they can form their thoughts about student character development and the importance of our Core Values to the mission and purpose of the College.

Four words describe the cardinal directions of our College's moral compass.



Character is the “true north” of GMC’s moral compass; and it is also the concept that embodies our Core Values which are: **Duty, Honor, and Country**. The College hopes that students will understand and accept the wisdom found in Douglas Southall Freeman’s definition of “character”:

“What is character? It is that quality of man which is going to make a man, in an hour of strain, do the just and if possible the generous thing.

Character is that quality of mind which makes truth telling instinctive rather than strange.

Character is the essence of all that a man has seen in life and regards as high and exalted...

Character is the starting point from which we go on.... “

DUTY, HONOR, COUNTRY! These words, these values, are the heart of the GMC Cadet Regimental Accolade, which is taught to every GMC Cadet. The Accolade reminds students that “Character” is paramount and “Duty, Honor, and Country” are values worth living. The Accolade echoes across Main Campus during morning formations, at parades, and in the greeting Cadets share with GMC officers. “Duty, Honor, and Country” is a set of values already held in common by many GMC students. Just as Georgia Military College students at Main Campus model the institution’s values for all students, so do our Distant Learning Center students who are also serving members in the Armed Forces. These students bring with them into every GMC classroom their commitment to the College values because these are also the values cherished by their profession, the profession of arms. Many of our students already know first hand that the color of **Duty** is red. They have served with men and women who shed blood for their nation. They understand that the color of **Honor** is white because they know how important it is to be men and women of unimpeachable integrity. These same students understand why the color of **Country** is blue. On our precious National Flag, blue is the color of the field that holds the stars of the nation we expect our students to faithfully serve as good and productive citizens. As well, blue is the color that represents the high standards of moral courage we hope our students will habitually display as they seek to build lives of character.

REGIMENTAL ACCOLADE
“Prepare For The Regimental Accolade!”
“CHARACTER ABOVE ALL, SIR!”
“Three Words To Live By!”
“DUTY! HONOR! COUNTRY! SIR!”

Duty describes a moral obligation--that is, the compulsion felt to meet one’s obligations. Duty compels us to do the right thing at the right time, regardless of adverse consequences. It is the precursor of discipline and obedience. Duty requires that we accept responsibility for our actions. Duty is a personal choice. It is an expression of individual will. It reveals itself through the accomplishment of all required tasks, done on time and to the best of one’s ability. Duty also looks beyond just satisfying the needs of the individual to finding opportunities to benefit the communities to which we belong.

In the words of Dag Hammarskjold, former Secretary-General of the U.N., “A task becomes a duty from the moment you suspect it to be an essential part of that integrity which alone entitles a man to assume responsibility.”

Obviously, having a sense of duty is important. But, duty to whom? Duty to what? We have our historic duty to God and Country. We have a duty to our state and local governments. We also have a duty to fellow citizens. Finally, we have a duty to ourselves.

We fulfill our duty to the Supreme Being we worship by being men and women of conscience--by believing that universal right and wrong do exist and, of course, acting on that belief by habitually doing the things that are right and good.

Our duty to nation, state, and local governments is perhaps a more obvious duty. It is our duty to be good citizens in the “republic for which we stand.” As such, we are expected to pay our taxes, perhaps serve in our Armed Forces, and obey the “just” laws put in place to protect everyone. As well, and central to the duty to be good citizens, is our duty to vote; even when it is inconvenient and even when the choices are difficult--voting and selfless service are duties that describe good citizenship.

We fulfill our duty to fellow citizens in many ways. We share with them the belief that “All men are created equal.” Our respect for the dignity of all people finds expression in the way we treat others. By using the Golden Rule as our guide (“Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”), we give voice to our belief that we live in a moral community in which it is our duty to treat others with respect, dignity, and kindness and in ways where cost is not counted. Where we cannot do good we resolve at least to do no harm. It is also our duty to help those in need. Vice President Hubert Humphrey drove home this last point when he said,

“The moral test of good government is how it treats those who are in the dawn of life, the children; those who are in the twilight of life, the aged; and those who are in the shadows of life, the sick, the needy and the handicapped.”

Finally, we have a duty to keep ourselves spiritually, intellectually, and physically fit. We fulfill this duty by developing a lifelong habit of learning, reflecting, and growing in our faith. Stephen R. Covey in his book [The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People](#) calls this duty to keep fit--“sharpening the saw.”

“Sharpening the saw is about constantly renewing ourselves in the four basic areas of life: physical, social/emotional, mental, and spiritual. It’s the habit that increases our capacity to live all other habits of effectiveness.”

And, make no mistake. Duty is a tough taskmaster. When exhausted, it is our strong sense of duty that should keep us going. It is that same sense of duty that keeps the policeman vigilant while on patrol in the middle of the night. It is duty that encourages us to honor commitments that might later cause us inconvenience. Said another way, duty is all about doing the right thing, in the right way, for the right reason, at the right place, at the right time, for as long as ever we can. We should do our duty simply because it is the right thing to do and for no other reason.

How should we ask our students to think about “honor?” When we say that a person has behaved honorably, we mean that that person has demonstrated a keen sense of, and strict adherence to, what is considered ethically right. **Honor** is the tribute we pay to virtue. Honor is not so much a thing in itself as much as it is recognition of other things; especially recognition of lives lived in well and in accordance with the virtues, most notably prudence, justice, temperance, fortitude, faith, hope, and charity. When we honor people, the honor comes not from us but from them, from that which they reflect in the way they have conducted their lives. The honor they exemplify by living virtuously is an admonition to us to go and do likewise.

Duty and Honor are inseparable companion-values that travel everywhere together. After all, it is our duty to behave honorably. President Woodrow Wilson emphasized the companion nature of duty and honor when he wrote,

“There is no question what the roll of honor in America is. The roll of honor consists of the names of men who have squared their conduct by ideals of duty.”

Honor requires of us that we habitually live to the highest moral standards. An honorable person believes that there are universal moral principles that bind us all. The principle that calls on us to think, believe, feel, and act honorably forms the foundation of the GMC Student Honor Code.

As a matter of honor, **GMC students do not lie, cheat, or steal, or tolerate those who do.** This is the minimum standard expected of all students. It is not a lofty goal that we hope our students will strive to attain. Rather, it is the minimum standard--the floor and not the ceiling of expected ethical and honorable behavior.

The Honor Code requires truthfulness in every respect. Lying is dishonorable. Remember Douglas Southall Freeman’s words cited earlier? “Character is that quality of mind which makes truth telling instinctive rather than strange.”

The Honor Code insists on justice--it forbids cheating.

The Honor Code recognizes and mandates respect for other people and their property--it forbids stealing.

The Honor Code commands an individual’s commitment to high ethical standards--it forbids tolerance of honor violations.

It is important for our students to know that they are the architects, builders, and owners of their own reputations for being men and women of honor. Honorable reputations are earned and kept--not given and overlooked. This important point is made in the movie *Rob Roy* when the main character, played by Liam Neeson, explained to his sons the importance of personal honor by telling them, “Honor is a gift that a man gives to himself . . . It cannot be taken away

from you, it can only be given away.” His words mirror those of the German philosopher, Arthur Schopenhauer, who wrote, “Honor is not to be won, it must only not be lost.”

The third of our core values is **Country**. Despite all of our nation’s problems, and there are many, America is still the greatest country in the world. America’s greatness is founded on timeless principles such as those addressed in the Declaration of Independence and our Constitution. Senator John McCain, U.S. Senator from Arizona, makes the point that our military might and foreign policies may sometimes fail us but the principles on which our Nation is founded never will. “Iron Curtains” may not fall before our armies but they will fall before the principles that form our Democracy such as Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness.

America’s greatness is not based just on economic or military strength. Rather, our greatness rises from the fact that Americans are able to put their social, political, economic, and military strength to work helping people in need and assisting nations in crisis perhaps better than any other country in the world. We go to Iraq to prevent crimes against humanity. We go to Bosnia to prevent genocide. We go to Somalia to prevent the starvation of a nation. We comprise a citizenry willing to share its good fortune and strength with anyone in the world who genuinely needs it.

More than two centuries ago, our Nation's founders, with clear vision, courageous hearts, and a profound sense of duty and honor, fashioned a new form of government for our new country. They created a government that honors human dignity and protects individual rights--a democracy strong enough to withstand external threats, secure enough to allow dissent from within, and prosperous enough to help our citizens achieve their dreams. In doing so, America's founders created a Nation that inspired loyalty from its citizens and gave hope to oppressed peoples around the world.

Since then, generations of Americans have reaffirmed their loyalty and devotion to our country. During times of war, Americans have fought and died to defend our liberty and promote the ideals of democracy. In times of peace, we have labored to preserve the rights secured for us in the Constitution and to ensure that every American enjoys the full protection of those rights. And throughout our nation’s history, Americans have worked to build upon the "more perfect Union" envisioned by our country's founders.

Most dictionaries define patriotism as "love of country and devotion to its welfare." A patriot is "one who loves his (or her) country and zealously supports its interests."

We want our students to be fierce patriots.

Patriotism means love of country and implies a readiness to sacrifice for it, to fight for it, perhaps even to give one's life for it. In the traditional or Spartan sense, patriots are those who

love their country simply because it is their country--because it is "their birthplace and the mansion of their fathers," as Alexis de Tocqueville put it in his Democracy in America. Patriotism is a kind of filial piety.

When our students are called on to name American heroes, we, of course, want them to think of the likes of Nathan Hale, who regretted he had "but one life to give for his country." We want them to remember Admiral David Farragut, who said, "Damn the torpedoes! Full speed ahead!" We want them to feel the patriotism of Patrick Henry when he exclaimed, "Give me liberty or give me death!"

Certainly these are heroes and patriots, just as are the volunteers, firemen, and policemen who entered but did not leave the World Trade Center buildings on September 11, 2001. And there were many other men and women just like them who rose to challenges, met crisis and physical danger, faced death and defeat, and won. They saved lives, conquered armies, dared mightily--stared death in the face and became national heroes.

Having said these things, let us take time to convince our students that there is another kind of true American Patriot. There is an American Patriot who will never make headlines, be singled out for any award or even be noticed by anybody but close family and friends. She'll live a long, productive, quiet life--and be buried with very little fanfare. But she is nevertheless a true American Patriot. Pat Boone, in remarks delivered at the Americanism Educational League's 67th Anniversary Dinner in Los Angeles, California, on February 26, 1994, painted the following picture of this special kind of American Patriot.

He is the kind of person each of our students should be proud to become. "He's an accountant who supports his family, takes them with him to church or synagogue, pays every nickel of his taxes--and advises his clients to do the same. She's a homemaker--a wife and mother--who not only raises and trains and nourishes her children--but also is active in the PTA and Brownies and Cub Scouts.

He's a gas station attendant who walks the precincts, getting out the vote--for city councilmen, not just presidents and governors. She's a college professor who loves her subject and her students, and actually awakens in them a sense of pride in America and a sense of personal responsibility.

He's a local preacher, not a nationally-known TV evangelist but a gentle, loving man who is a Good Samaritan--and somehow inspires his little congregation to reach out to the hurting and needy around them. She's a volunteer, involved in a thousand worthy causes, political, social,

humanitarian and spiritual--who gives and gives and gives some more, never expecting anything in return personally--just the satisfaction of having made a difference.

He's a policeman. He walks a beat and wears that badge, and he believes in those rules that hold a society together. He obeys and defends and preserves the Law.” She’s a National Guard soldier who leaves family, school, and job to join her military unit in a disaster relief operation.

These--and so many others--are American Patriots. They're quiet, hardworking, and honest. They are sharing and neighborly people. They vote, pay taxes, go to church, work two or three jobs, and still volunteer for worthy causes. They write their congressman, buy American if they can, pray for their President (even if they didn't vote for him or agree with his decisions), and sing the Star Spangled Banner at baseball and football games with a lump in their throats, overflowing hearts, and tears in their eyes. Their eyes sting when the Flag goes by during a parade, and mist over when the “Battle Hymn of the Republic” is played on a gospel piano or as they read Henry Holcomb Bennett’s words taken from his poem, *The Flag Goes By*.

**“Hats off!
Along the street there comes
A blare of bugles, a ruffle of drums,
A flash of color beneath the sky:
Hats off!
The Flag is passing by!”**

The rest of the world still envies America. And it's not because of our heroes--they all have their own; it's because of the millions of American Patriots and what they've accomplished together. It's because of the American Spirit--that contagious, inspiring, and wonderful ***"WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP?"*** force that causes our neighbors to drive across state lines with food, water, and ice for hurricane victims. It is the spirit that ties us together, that unites us into a family of more than 250 million people.

Yes, that force, that “Can Do” Spirit, has made us still the envy and role model of the whole world--but you can't buy it wholesale or in quantity. It comes in individual packages--and it's exhibited in lifelong, often anonymous commitment--and each package is an American Patriot. That’s what we want to see each of our students fiercely believe—and become.

It was the “Can Do” spirit of an obscure Army lieutenant named Andrew Rowan that inspired Elbert Hubbard in 1899 to write [A Message to Garcia](#), a part of which is excerpted below:

“In all this Cuban business there is one man stands out on the horizon of my memory like Mars at perihelion. When war broke out between Spain and the United States, it was very necessary to communicate quickly with the leader of the insurgents. Garcia was somewhere in the mountain vastness of Cuba—no one knew where. No mail or telegraph message could reach him. The President must secure his cooperation, and quickly. What to do!

Some one said to the President, ‘There’s a fellow by the name of Rowan will find Garcia for you, if anybody can.’ Rowan was sent for and given a letter to be delivered to Garcia. How ‘the fellow by the name of Rowan’ took the letter, sealed it up in an oil-skin pouch, strapped it over his heart, in four days landed by night off the coast of Cuba from an open boat, disappeared into the jungle, and in three weeks came out on the other side of the Island, having traversed a hostile country on foot, and delivered his letter to Garcia, are things I have no special desire now to tell in detail.

The point I wish to make is this: McKinley gave Rowan a letter to be delivered to Garcia; Rowan took the letter and did not ask, ‘Where is he at?’ By the Eternal! There is a man whose form should be cast in deathless bronze and the statue placed in every college of the land. It is not book-learning young men need, nor instruction about this and that, but a stiffening of the vertebrae which will cause them to be loyal to a trust, to act promptly, concentrate their energies: do the thing- ‘Carry a message to Garcia!’”

There is a feeling about being an American that we want our students to have. It is the same feeling described by Antoine de St. Exupéry, French aviator and author, who wrote about his own country,

“Only he can understand . . . what a country is, who shall have sacrificed part of himself to his. . .country, fought to save it, struggled to make it beautiful. Only then will the love of farm or country fill his heart.”

Georgian, and former President Jimmy Carter, might have added,

“A strong nation, like a strong person, can afford to be gentle, firm, thoughtful and restrained. It can afford to extend a helping hand to others. It’s a weak nation, like a weak person, that must behave with bluster and boasting and rashness and other signs of insecurity.”

American novelist Sinclair Lewis, in an interview in Berlin, Germany, in 1930, wrote, “Intellectually, I know that America is no better than any other country; emotionally, I know she is better than every other country.”

With the persistence and fervor of a Lieutenant Andrew Rowan, let us carry these thoughts to our students along with the admonition: **Character Above All! Duty, Honor, Country!**