

Part 1 of this two-part article outlines what AFROTC is and what life is like as an AFROTC student. Look to part 2 for the pilot-centric discussion of earning a pilot slot. Two articles about the PCSM score follow.

<https://bogidope.com/upt/the-ultimate-guide-to-earning-a-pilot-slot-in-air-force-rotc-part-1/>



The Ultimate Guide to Earning a Pilot Slot in Air Force ROTC, Part 1

By [El Tee](#)

Part 1: Air Force Reserve Officers' Training Corps (AFROTC)

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What is AFROTC?

There are various ways to break into the world of United States Air Force aviation and one of those ways is through the Air Force Reserve Officers' Training Corps (AFROTC). You may have heard the term ROTC before, but this article will break into what ROTC is, provide context, personal experience, and advice.

There are three different ways to become a commissioned officer in the United States Air Force: Service Academies, AFROTC, and OTS. AFROTC is unique in that you are a regular student on a college campus; you just also happen to be training to become an Officer. AFROTC offers various lengths of the program to earn your commission with the most common being four years; you participate each year throughout your college career. You can also join AFROTC as an "AS 250" where you join the program in your second year of college, after transferring from a community college, or when you have at least three years remaining of school. There are programs available for Active Duty Enlisted members to join AFROTC as well, but I recommend reaching out to your desired ROTC detachment for details.

Over 1,100 universities in the country offer an AFROTC program, although not every campus physically has an AFROTC detachment. The detachment is the physical location and "Cadet Wing" where your training will occur. If your college or university does not have an AFROTC detachment, you can participate in the program as a "cross town" student. This means you attend the college or university of your choice and do your AFROTC training at the host university with the AFROTC detachment. This might mean that you will have to travel anywhere from a couple of minutes to a couple of hours each week to the AFROTC detachment to participate in the program. You can search for local detachments and schools with cross town agreements at [here](#).

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How to Join and Requirements

There is not an application to fill out and you do not have to be "selected" to join AFROTC. In my experience, simply enrolling in the necessary AFROTC courses at your university enrolls you in the program. I recommend reaching out to the AFROTC detachment you are interested in for more specific details on how to join your desired detachment. Every detachment has a recruiting officer that would be more than willing to speak with you and explain your options. Joining or inquiring about AFROTC does NOT mean you are committed to serving in the Air Force. Everyone is qualified to at least try it out and you can major in whatever you would like. Ideally, you would enroll in AFROTC your freshman year of college or the Fall semester of your sophomore year of college. To be in AFROTC you must be a full-time student and have at least 3 years remaining until graduation. Most people assume that if you are doing a ROTC program, your education is being paid for, you are required to serve after you graduate, and you are a STEM major; but this is not always true. There are some great AFROTC scholarship opportunities, but it is NOT necessary to be on scholarship to participate in AFROTC.

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Scholarship Opportunities

AFROTC does offer various "types" of scholarships to selected cadets. As a high school student, you can apply to the High School Scholarship Program (HSSP) generally between June and early January of your senior year of high school. If awarded a scholarship, it may be a Type 1, Type 2, or Type 7.

Essentially, a Type 1 scholarship will cover all tuition and fees at any private or public university with an AFROTC detachment. A Type 2 will provide up to \$18,000 per year toward tuition and fees at any private or public university with an AFROTC detachment. A Type 7 will pay 100% of tuition and fees at a public university at the in-state tuition rate. The Type 7 can be converted to a three-year Type 2 scholarship to be used out of state or at a private university as well.

Every AFROTC HSSP Cadet, regardless of type, will receive a monthly stipend and book stipend once a semester. The HSSP is generally very competitive and will require high ACT/SAT scores as AFROTC is given a limited amount of scholarships to award each year. [Click here](#) for more information on requirements and how to apply to the HSSP.

As a current college student/AFROTC Cadet you can be selected for the In-College Scholarship Program (ICSP). The ICSP is very competitive among current Cadets and will require you to stand out in your first year of AFROTC. You do not personally apply for this program, your AFROTC Cadre will put you up for it if you qualify. Speak to your cadre about these requirements. More recently there have been limited ICSP scholarship awardees. If selected by this program it is possible to receive a Type 2, Nursing Scholarship, or a Type 1 Commanders' Scholarship. Further details available [here](#).



Capt. Lisa McLean, 18th Air Force and 618th Air and Space Operations Center (Tanker Airlift Control Center) section commander, used the Airman Scholarship and Commissioning Program to earn her education and transition from an enlisted airman to an officer. Once McLean started her education, she found she does not want to stop.

Lastly, as a current Enlisted member it is possible to receive an AFROTC scholarship via the [ASCP and SOAR programs](#). It is important to note that if you are on scholarship you must sign a service commitment and serve at least 4 years following your college graduation. If you are not on scholarship you will contract with AFROTC after Field Training and will be committed to serving at that point. If you are Enlisted in a guard or reserve component while you are in college and participating in AFROTC, you will not contract with ROTC until just before commissioning. Contact your local AFROTC detachment for more details on this process.

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Cadet Life – Year 1

In AFROTC you are not officially in the Air Force, you aren't an Active Duty Enlisted member or an Officer, your "title" is Cadet. In your first semester of AFROTC you will be referred to as an AS100 or an AS250. AS100 Cadets are those who join AFROTC as a freshman/first year college student with the

intention of completing at least 4 years of the AFROTC program. AS250 Cadets are those who join AFROTC in their sophomore year or will be completing the more accelerated 3-year AFROTC program. All underclassmen or those that have not yet attended Field Training are called General Military Course (GMC) Cadets.

In your first year of AFROTC you will be taught everything you need to know to succeed in the program. For every year in the program you will attend a classroom course, a Leadership Laboratory (LLAB), and Physical Training (PT) every week; GMC Cadets are required to participate in 5 hours of AFROTC each week. During PT and LLAB you will be required to wear USAF uniforms. Some detachments require Cadets to wear their uniforms to their classroom course as well, however this is detachment dependent. So, you can expect to wear the uniform for a full day (7am-7pm) once a week and during PT.



AFROTC Leadership Laboratory takes many forms. In this photo, Kelly McKeague, director, Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA), briefs Air Force ROTC cadets from the University of Las Vegas, Nevada, Jan. 24, 2020. The brief showcased DPAA's unique capabilities while explaining the importance of the missions conducted around the world. DPAA's mission is to provide the fullest possible accounting of missing personnel to their families and the nation. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Michael O'Neal)

The classroom course will correspond to your AS level, and you will take the AS100 course in your first year. If you are an AS250, you will take the AS100 and AS200 course concurrently. These classes are mandatory to commission. The curriculum has changed in the AS100 course since I took it, but you can expect to learn about Air Force customs and courtesies as well as Air Force amenities and what an Air Force base has to offer. The AS 100 and 200 class usually meet once a week, but this is detachment dependent.

Leadership Laboratory (Lead Lab or LLAB) is where you will learn and hone your leadership skills and where they will be put to the test. Every detachment goes about LLAB differently, but in general you can expect to do a lot of marching as a GMC. You do not need any sort of basis in marching when you join the program, you will learn it all over your GMC years.

You are typically required to attend a minimum of two PT sessions each week. These are generally offered early in the morning before classes begin and aim to get you in shape for the Physical Fitness Assessment (PFA). Each semester of AFROTC, including your first semester, you will be required to take a PFA. Scholarship/contracted Cadets must pass the PFA, while it is not required that uncontracted Cadets pass the PFA, though still highly recommended. The PFA is comprised of one minute of push-ups, one minute of sit-ups, a 1.5-mile run, and a waist measurement. A minimum score of a 75 is required to pass the PFA, however, you also must pass each individual category. Scoring for the PFA can be found [here](#).

While the AS class, LLAB, and PT are the only required items for AFROTC, there are a variety of other AFROTC activities you might be required to attend each week as well. Again, these are detachment dependent. You may be required to participate in Flag Details, where you raise and lower the American Flag, Flight meetings, Squadron meetings, marching practice, extra PT, or extracurricular activities associated with AFROTC. Something important to keep in mind is that you must take time each week to care for your uniforms between shining shoes, ironing, dry cleaning, and perfectly placing your ranks and nametags.

In AFROTC there is a Cadet Wing, which is the organizational structure of the detachment. Every detachment runs their Cadet Wing differently, although no matter what detachment you attend, you will receive equivalent training. The Cadet Wing(s) will be comprised of groups, squadrons, and flights. As a new GMC you will likely be placed in a flight, which will be the group of Cadets that you work with throughout the semester and more specifically at LLAB. Multiple flights make up a squadron, multiple squadrons make up a group, and multiple groups create a wing. Some flights may hold weekly meetings for you to attend to keep up to date on the schedule, communication, and anything that needs to be done and it is highly recommended that you attend these meetings. Your flight will likely be led by an upperclassman. All upperclassmen will have a “job” in the detachment. As a new GMC, your “job” is to learn how to be a Cadet.

There are a few big milestones and hurdles throughout AFROTC, and the first one is passing DoDMERB. DoDMERB is the medical examination/physical you must pass to be qualified to contract with a scholarship, to attend Field Training and to commission. The process to having a qualified DoDMERB physical can take a long time. I recommend beginning this process as early as your AFROTC Cadre will allow you to, so you have as much time as possible to attain medical waivers if necessary. In my experience, I was able to get the DoDMERB physical completed and two weeks later I was qualified, which is not the norm. I had some friends begin around the same time I did and were not qualified for over a year. Take this process seriously and complete it ASAP.

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Cadet Life – Year 2

In between your freshman and sophomore year, you may be required to attend a Professional Development Training (PDT). PDTs can range from a few hours to a few weeks in length. There are a variety of exciting PDTs to attend from Operation Air Force (Ops AF) to Air Force Academy Freefall. The purpose of these PDTs is to get you better acquainted with the Air Force.

In your second year of AFROTC you will be an AS200. You will take the AS200 course and attend LLAB and PT just as you did in your AS100 year. Each detachment handles the AS200 year differently as it is the year which precedes AFROTC Field Training. Field Training is a 13-day training and evaluation evolution conducted at Maxwell AFB, Alabama. It is commonly thought of as “the basic training” of AFROTC.



Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps cadets learn about self-aid buddy care during a Field Training Preparatory Exercise (FTPX), Feb. 22, 2014, at Seymour Johnson Air Force Base, N.C. The FTPX is designed to prepare cadets to become officers and leaders in the operational Air Force. (U.S. Air Force photo by Airman 1st Class Aaron J. Jenne)

In preparation for Field Training, Cadets participate in Field Training Preparation (FTP). Some detachments utilize the entirety of the AS200 year for FTP, while some only use the spring semester of the AS200 year. By the time you are an AS200 you will generally be expected to understand how to be a functional Cadet, how to march, and you may even be expected to lead in some respects. Begin your AS200 year with confidence that you know how AFROTC works but understanding that you still have much to learn before Field Training. You will continue learning how to be a dynamic follower but will begin exploring what it means to be a leader. There are a few milestones that you must get through before progressing in the program.

The Fall semester of your AS200 year is when you usually take the Air Force Officer Qualifying Test (AFOQT). To qualify to be an Officer, you must pass the AFOQT. You have two opportunities to pass the AFOQT, although you must wait 150 days between each AFOQT attempt. It is possible to receive a waiver to attempt the AFOQT a third time, but do not rely on this. [BogjDope](#) has written a series of articles on the AFOQT, I recommend checking them out for [details](#). In AFROTC usually your score is not extremely important, you just need to pass; however, if you would like to compete for a Rated (pilot) slot, that is a different story. I HIGHLY recommend studying for the AFOQT and taking it seriously as you must not only pass it, but you will need competitive scores throughout.

Next, you must earn a "slot" to Field Training. You must attend and graduate Field Training to be eligible to move on in the AFROTC program and commission, but not everyone is "invited" to attend Field Training, regardless of being contracted or on scholarship. You must earn an Enrollment Allocation (EA) for Field Training, usually in the spring semester of your AS200 year. This is done on a national level and is sort of out of your control. What you can do to give yourself the best chance of attending Field Training is to actively participate in AFROTC and have a great attitude, keep your grades up and your GPA high,

and workout to earn a high PFA score. All of these things go into earning an EA. Every year the percentage of Cadets selected for Field Training/awarded an EA fluctuates.

Once you earn an EA, you must attend Field Training. Cadets from all over the country will arrive to Maxwell AFB during the summer after their AS200/250/500 year to experience Field Training. You will be tested on your leadership capabilities, ability to operate under pressure, attention to detail, physical fitness, wingmanship, and more. Field Training can be stressful, but it is absolutely not something to worry about. You will be prepared. In the course of about two weeks your flight will go from complete strangers from all corners of the country to a bonded family who got through the experience together.

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Cadet Life – Year 3

In your third year of AFROTC you will be either an AS300 or an AS500. An AS300 is a traditional Cadet in their third year of the AFROTC program who just completed Field Training. Those who return from Field training and progress in the program become Professional Officer Course (POC) Cadets. If you are not on scholarship or contracted prior to Field Training, you will contract with the Air Force at this time and be obligated to serve at least 4 years. An AS500 is a Cadet in their third year of AFROTC who did not attend Field Training, is not medically qualified, did not earn an EA, or did not make the grades the semester before Field Training. AS500 Cadets usually remain in the GMC Corps and participate as underclassmen. The majority of third year Cadets will be AS300s.

The transition from GMC to POC changes your responsibilities. As a GMC your main job is to learn how to be a follower, how AFROTC works, and just absorb as much information as you can. As a POC, you mold into a leader. POCs have “jobs” in the detachment. For example, you may be a Flight Commander, in charge of training, developing, and leading 20+ Cadets. You might be a Physical Fitness Officer in charge of PT for the whole Cadet Wing. Or you might be a Public Affairs Officer in charge of taking pictures of detachment events and managing the detachment social media. Depending on the size of your Cadet Wing, you may have a more dynamic leadership role, or one where you do not lead younger Cadets as much. What is common across all detachments is that you will be spending a lot more time in AFROTC.

As a POC you are required to participate in AFROTC at least 8 hours a week. Your AS300 course will be 3 credit hours and you will meet more times a week. This might mean you will be in uniform more times throughout the week also.

The AS300 year is usually a lot of fun as you become a leader and a mentor. As a GMC you look up to POCs and you usually think they have it easier and have more freedom. Do not be fooled by this illusion, however. Sure, POCs may not have to march as much or maybe they are in charge of the uniform inspections, but they also have to maintain their uniforms just like GMCs, set the example for GMCs, do their POC job, attend more hours of AFROTC, and still keep a high GPA. In practice, POCs do a lot more than 8 hours of AFROTC a week. The AS300 year is also exciting for Air Force Specialty Code (AFSC) selection, more on this later.

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Cadet Life – Year 4

Year 4. You finally made it. At this point you might be tired of the 5am wake ups and exhausted from the countless sleepless nights trying to plan an AFROTC event, while you have three midterms the same week. You can finally see the light at the end of the tunnel, commissioning is just two semesters away.

Between your AS300 and AS400 years, you may be required to complete one last PDT. As an AS400, you are the oldest and most AFROTC experienced. Your job is to teach the AS300s how to lead the

detachment. You begin to lead leaders. POCs effectively keep the whole detachment running. They oversee all of the training evolutions and AFROTC events. As an AS400 you will likely have a more dynamic leadership role. These jobs usually include Cadet Wing Commander, Operations Group Commander, or Mission Support Group Commander. Essentially, you are a top dog in charge of a lot of Cadets below you. You still must attend the AS400 course, LLAB, and PT.



Lieutenant Colonel John Keeler, the 104th Fighter Wing executive officer, spent time teaching University of Massachusetts Amherst Air Force ROTC cadets, giving them a different perspective on how Air Force officers perform their duties on Feb. 22, 2019, at UMass Amherst, in Amherst, Massachusetts. Lieutenant Colonel Mark Guerber, the Detachment 370 ROTC commander, said having a different officer working with the cadets gives them a showcase of broader experiences to learn from. Pictured left to right are Victoria King, Josiah Douglas, Alex Pelletier, Lt. Col. Keeler, Patrick Mei, and Jessie Joseph. (U.S. Air National Guard photos by Airman Sara Kolinski)

At this point in your Cadet career I highly suggest taking a step back and evaluating your leadership skills. You may feel like you are over AFROTC and already completely developed as a leader, but do not lose sight of the fact that there is always room for improvement and there are always things to learn. In AFROTC you have the amazing opportunity of having a Colonel just down the hallway always available to talk with you and provide mentorship. It might seem intimidating but take every opportunity you can to learn from these leaders.

There are a few exciting milestones throughout the AS400 year, with those being AFSC Selection results, Air Force Base assignments, and finally commissioning. From Air Force ROTC you will commission into the Inactive Ready Reserve and will not Enter Active Duty (EAD) until a specified date (usually you will find out what this date is in your AS400 year). When you EAD, you will begin your service commitment and career! This is slightly different from the Air Force Academy or OTS in that once they commission. They begin their career immediately. With AFROTC, you may have to wait a few months up to a year before you begin. It is important to note that from AFROTC you will serve on Active Duty (AD), however,

more recently AFROTC has begun to commission some cadets into the Air National Guard (ANG) and Air Force Reserve (AFR). More on that in Part 2.

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Cadet Ranking

Like having a GPA in school, your Commander's Ranking will be like your Cadet GPA. You will be rack and stacked by your detachment Commander among all the other Cadets in your AFROTC detachment. Most Commanders will not disclose this information to you or anyone else, but once you are in the program you will likely be able to gauge where you stand in the program. The Commander's Ranking is out of your hands, but it becomes extremely important. To be selected for the coveted PDT you want to attend, an EA, and your dream AFSC, your Commander's Ranking will be involved.

You will be competing against Cadets nationwide for all of these things and every cadet will be ranked by their Commander. Some detachments have more Cadets than others, so think of your rank expressed in thirds rather than a specific number. For example, being ranked number 5/50 in your detachment is equivalent with someone else ranking 18/180. You will often hear Cadets refer to ranking as top third, middle third, or bottom third. Always strive to be in the top third.

While you do not have any direct control over your ranking, you can control your attitude, how much effort you put in, your professionalism, and your physical fitness. It might not seem like it, but your Commander will hear about everything you do and will take ranking advice from those who work closest with you. My biggest advice to earn a top third Commander's Ranking is to always put in 100% effort when you are at an AFROTC event, maintain a positive attitude, always be professional in AFROTC situations, and work out outside of AFROTC to earn high PFA scores.

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What are your Chances?

AFROTC is a long four years. Many things change and different opportunities arise. For example, when I started AFROTC I began with about 55 Cadets. I commissioned alongside 6 of those people. Cadets ebb and flow, some join later in the program, some take longer to finish their degree and take an extra year, but most do not make it through the program. AFROTC is not hard, but it is time consuming and you have to want it to make it through. Keep in mind that this is just one class of Cadets from just one detachment, other classes and other detachments may have much higher retention rates.

In terms of earning a scholarship, every year the amount of scholarships offered changes, but the stats to earn one usually stay consistent. For example, in FY18 for the HSSP, there were 5,581 applications submitted with 2,851 of those being eligible, 2,789 received interviews, and 2,279 were offered scholarships. The averages were 12% Type 1, 19% Type 2, and 69% Type 7 with an average SAT score of 1350, ACT of 30, 3.71 GPA, and 73% of selectees were STEM majors. When my class went up for ICSP in my freshman year, 9 of us were submitted, 5 of us were offered scholarships, and we all had a 3.5 or above, and were STEM majors. Two years after my class, about 15 were submitted and just 2 were awarded scholarships. It is hard to put an average with ICSP results, but if you earn a high GPA your first semester, make it through DoDMERB, and work hard in AFROTC, your chances will be high.

Field Training EAs awarded also fluctuate each year. In 2019 there was selection rate of 91.6% with an average CGPA of 3.251 and PFA of 95.03 and in 2018 there was an 88.8% selection rate with selects having an average CGPA of 3.24 and PFA of 94.71. A few years earlier in 2015 there was an 85.8% selection rate with an average CGPA of 3.305 and PFA of 96.55.

If you want to be a pilot or any kind of flier, Rated AFSC selections might be the most exciting and nerve-racking part of AFROTC for you. The Rated board for FY19 commissionees had 932 applicants with 762 selectees, this was a much higher selection than previous years. The average CGPA was 3.22, PFA was 96.04, PCSM was 47.5, AFOQT CSO was 66.6, and AFOQT ABM was 62. Breaking it down further, there were 466 pilot selects with an average CGPA of 3.35, 97.30 PFA, and 60.2 PCSM. Like scholarships, every year AFROTC is given a different number of slots they can award to cadets. To show the disparity in [pilot slots](#) per year, the FY16 Board had 965 applicants, with 694 total Rated selects and 345 of those being pilot. The pilot selects had an average of a 3.422 CGPA, 97.80 PFA, and 66.3 PCSM. [Back to Contents](#)

AFSC Selection

Typically, during your AS300 (Junior) year of AFROTC you will put in Non-Rated AFSC (Air Force Specialty Code, aka job title) preferences in the Fall semester and find out what AFSC you will be serving as in the Fall of your AS400 (Senior) year. It is not guaranteed that you will get your top choice of AFSC and you may be required to serve your commitment in an AFSC that was not on your “dream sheet.” Non-[Rated jobs](#) are essentially everything that does not put you in an airplane or in control of an airplane.



RPA pilot is one of the four rated career fields AFROTC cadets can choose from. (U.S. Air Force photo by Senior Airman Haley Stevens)

There are four Rated career fields, those being Pilot, Remotely Piloted Aircraft Pilot (RPA), Combat Systems Officer (CSO), and Air Battle Manager (ABM). Rated career fields also come with longer service commitments. Selection for these four career fields is separate from the “AFSC dream sheet” you will submit in your AS300 year. Regardless of interest in the Rated career fields, everyone will have to submit for Non-Rated AFSCs. The process of earning a Rated slot, more specifically, a pilot slot in AFROTC will be outlined in Part 2 of this article series.

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Decision Time

As discussed previously, you may be given an AFSC that you did not have on your dream sheet. You will have to serve in this Air Force with this AFSC until you can cross train or until your service commitment is

complete. In AFROTC, you contract either when you accept a scholarship or after Field Training. Once you are contracted, you must serve at least 4 years following commissioning, in a Non-Rated AFSC. If awarded a Rated slot your commitment will become either 6 or 10 years. There are situations where you may be able to “get out of” your service obligation before commissioning by paying your scholarship back or enlisting into the Air Force. You sign an obligation to the Air Force before you find out what AFSC you will be serving in. This is one reason why it is important to be passionate about serving and not just being a pilot if you participate in AFROTC.

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My AFROTC Experience and Advice

I recently graduated with an undergraduate degree and commissioned from AFROTC. Enrolling in AFROTC was hands down one of the best decisions I have made, but that does not mean it was easy. As a STEM major and Cadet extremely involved with the AFROTC program, there is not a whole lot of free time. While you are only required to participate in 5 hours of AFROTC each week as a GMC and 8 hours each week as a POC, in practice it is usually a lot more than that. Again, it is all preference, you get out of AFROTC what you put into it. If you want to earn a pilot slot, you are probably going to need to put more time into the program (discussed in the next article).

As a high school student, I always knew I wanted to serve, but I did not know how I was going to go about it. I did not come from a military family and was not really exposed to aviation other than commercial flights. I found myself at an airshow by accident one day, and that was it, I knew I was joining the Air Force and that I was going to fly.

I came across AFROTC in my senior year of high school and noticed there was a deadline to apply for the AFROTC HSSP, but I did not end up applying because I was too nervous to tell my parents that I wanted to join AFROTC. In hindsight this was dumb, and I should have just told them earlier and applied. Anyway, I eventually told my parents, visited the detachment at the university I was slated to attend the following fall, and enrolled in AFROTC.

Starting the program, I did not know what to expect, the best advice I have for anyone in this situation is to put yourself out there, be respectful, and be a sponge: learn. AFROTC will teach you everything you need to know, and you will do well in the program if you put 100% effort into every AFROTC event you attend.

I was a traditional four-year Cadet and earned a scholarship via the ICSP after my first semester in the program. AFROTC afforded me some amazing experiences throughout my collegiate career such as Ops AF where I spent three weeks at an Air Force Base shadowing almost every different career field the Air Force. The program did not limit me from being a regular college student and participating in other clubs or events either. I was able to take a semester off from AFROTC to study abroad in Europe and it did not impact my scholarship or standing in AFROTC. I met some of my best friends in the program and experienced some of the most exciting days of my life in the program; I will never forget how I felt when I was told I got selected for pilot training.

Amazing experiences and opportunities aside, I would be lying if I said it was easy and I didn't dread some of the 5am wake ups for PT. The program can be draining if you do not set time aside for yourself. It is easy to get caught up doing something for AFROTC and forget about some homework you might have due the next day. School is extremely important. You have to keep your grades up to remain in the program and you have to graduate to be able to commission.

Some days will feel like all you do is school and AFROTC, but you just have to take one day at a time and know that it will be worth it in the end. I spent countless days in my AFROTC detachment, basically living

there in between classes. At the time I just wanted a break but looking back I made some of the best memories with my fellow Cadets during those days.

Always have a positive attitude. It will be hard, but try. In my experience, one Cadet with a negative attitude could bring a whole flight down and make the program feel miserable. Work hard, help out your wingmen, take some time for yourself, and be positive. It might feel like forever (some days will feel like weeks and some weeks will feel like years), but semesters will feel like minutes and before you know it you will be taking the Oath of Office and commissioning as a Second Lieutenant. Every early wake up for PT, late night shining your shoes, and hour spent perfecting memorandums will pay off when you commission and await your future career.

If you are interested in learning more about Cadet life, getting advice, and hearing from current and former AFROTC Cadets, check out [r/AFROTC on Reddit](#).

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Cadet Officers: <https://www.dvidshub.net/image/5140051/104th-fighter-wing-officer-teaches-air-force-rotc-cadets>.

MQ-9 Reaper at sunrise: <https://www.dvidshub.net/image/6007937/mq-9-reaper>.



The Ultimate Guide to Earning a Pilot Slot in Air Force ROTC, Part 2

By [El Tee](#)

In [part one](#) of this article series, we discussed what Air Force ROTC is and what it is like. This article will detail how you can earn a pilot slot through the program and attend Undergraduate Pilot Training (UPT) upon your commission. As discussed in the previous article, the majority of AFROTC Cadets will commission to Active Duty (AD). This article will explain the AFROTC AD pilot selection process as well as the newer, lesser known AFROTC to Air Force Reserve program and the possibility of AFROTC to Air National Guard.

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Active Duty

Earning an Active Duty (AD) pilot slot in Air Force ROTC is the most common route. AFROTC cadets will meet a Rated Board in the Spring of their Junior year (AS 300 year) or in the Fiscal Year (FY) preceding the FY they will be commissioning, depending on the length of the individual's AFROTC program. For the Rated Board, cadets will rank their preference of Rated position from None to High. As discussed in the previous article, there are 4 Rated career fields: Pilot, RPA, CSO, and ABM. You must rank all of the Rated career fields when you meet the board. Cadets will simply input their preferences online and the AFROTC detachment Cadre members will route the paperwork up to the Rated Board (i.e. you will not physically meet a board, your paperwork will).

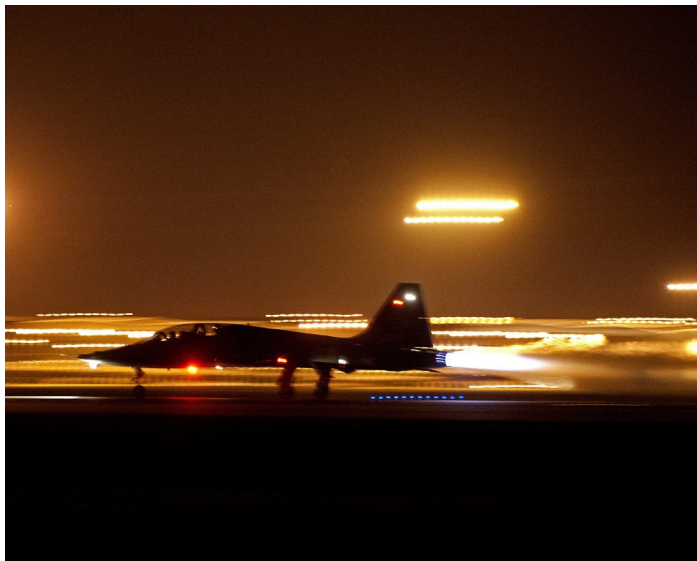
When the board convenes, cadets are selected for their respective Rated position based on an Order of Merit (OM) score. This score is comprised of a given Cadet's Pilot Candidate Selection Method (PCSM) Score, Relative Standing Score (RSS), GPA, Physical Fitness Assessment (PFA) Score, and Field Training Ranking. BogiDope has previously written an article all about the [PCSM Score](#), check that out [here](#) (also found below). The RSS is easily defined as your Commander's Ranking in your AFROTC detachment relative to all of the Cadets in your detachment.

Some great advice is to focus on the scores you can control. Keep your grades up, [study for the AFOQT](#) (specifically the pilot section), stay in shape, be present for AFROTC events, and maybe get

some flight hours to help out your PCSM score. While the Rated board does not convene until your AS300 year, your work to earn your pilot slot begins day one of AFROTC.

Following the Rated Board, if you were awarded a pilot slot, you will sign paperwork accepting the slot or not and committing to 10 years of service post UPT graduation. After that, you will go to Wright-Patterson Air Force Base for the Flight Physical; check out BogiDope's article on that [here](#). If you pass the Flight Physical, upon commissioning you will await your Enter Active Duty (EAD) date and report to your UPT base.

In your last year of AFROTC you will be able to submit base preferences and you should find out when your EAD will be. Around October of your last year of AFROTC you will have the opportunity to compete for a Euro-NATO Joint Jet Pilot Training (ENJJPT) slot. Earning an ENJJPT slot is very competitive, there are less ENJJPT classes per year than other [UPT bases](#) and those who attend ENJJPT will track T-38s (fighter/bomber track), other UPT bases have less T-38 slots. To apply for ENJJPT in AFROTC you simply check a box stating that you would like to volunteer for ENJJPT and then wait for the results.



An 80th Flying Training Wing Euro-NATO Joint Jet Pilot Training Program pilot takes off for a night flight in a T-38A Talon, Sept. 12, 2013, at Sheppard Air Force Base, Texas. Pilots train to fly in any kind of instrument weather condition, to be comfortable flying at night as they are in the day. (U.S. Air Force photo/Danny Webb/Released)

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Air Force Reserve

In an effort to better incorporate the Total Force Integration concept in the Air Force, AFROTC and Air Force Reserve Command (AFRC) released the [Reserve Categorization Process-Rated \(RCP-R\)](#) program a few years ago. This is a smaller program with somewhere around 15 Cadets being selected each year (this number fluctuates and may increase or decrease at any time).

In the Fall of their AS300/Junior year/the FY before their projected commissioning date AFROTC cadets will have the opportunity to apply for the RCP-R program either sponsored or unsponsored. Sponsored means that you have been hired directly by a specific AFRC squadron and unsponsored means you have not been hired by an AFRC squadron. The majority of AFROTC cadets will apply to the board unsponsored, but as this program gains traction, more cadets have become interested earlier on and have sought sponsorship from Reserve squadrons before the RCP-R board.

The program manager has released a [guidebook](#) for earning an AFRC Undergraduate Flying Training (UFT) slot and section 4 of this guidebook describes in detail how the AFROTC program works. If selected, Cadets will sign a commitment to serve 10 years in the AFRC upon UPT graduation and may

NOT apply for the AFROTC AD Rated Board the following Spring. The signed commitment to the AFRC will be contingent upon passing the Flying Class I Physical at Wright-Patterson AFB. If you do not pass you will be reverted to your AFROTC AD commitment.

After selection, Cadets will be contacted by an AFRC Recruiter who will help usher them through the paperwork process of being gained by the 340th Flying Training Group (340 FTG) upon commissioning. The 340 FTG will administratively "own" you throughout training; all training will be completed in an AD status. If the Cadet is selected as a sponsored candidate, they will inprocess with the 340 FTG, attend IFT/UPT/SERE/FTU and return to their sponsoring unit. Cadets who apply to the RCP-R sponsored are more likely to be selected.



0063cond Lt. Morgan Eckert, a 14th Student Squadron student pilot, puts on her G-suit Oct. 1, 2018, on Columbus Air Force Base, Mississippi. Eckert commissioned through the ROTC detachment at Indiana State University. The RCP-R can help you get to this stop at UPT, which is the most important thing. You can work to find sponsors before you get here, but worst case you're still an Active Duty USAF pilot. (U.S. Air Force photo by Tech. Sgt. Christopher Gross)

If the cadet is selected for UFT unsponsored they will also inprocess with the 340 FTG, attend IFT/UPT/SERE/FTU, but it will be very much on the cadet to find and earn sponsorship by a **Reserve** squadron, **NOT** an ANG squadron.* It is important to note that if you are selected unsponsored you will automatically track T-1s at UPT, meaning you will go the tanker/cargo route.

Currently, you may seek fighter/bomber sponsorship only up until you inprocess with the 340 FTG following commissioning. If you earn an AFRC UPT slot in the Fall of your Junior year you will have just over a year and a half before you inprocess. This is because they plan your training pipeline based on track selection, so it is not simple (though not completely impossible) to change your training pipeline after you have started UPT.

Creating relationships with squadrons you are interested in flying for is imperative to end up where you want to be. I recommend beginning to make these connections as early as possible. Timing is extremely important when applying to AFRC squadrons. If you do not attain sponsorship by a squadron by the time you arrive to your UPT location, your sponsorship will become a job for the Reserve Liaison Officer (LNO) at your base. He or she will reach out to squadrons and set up interviews for you. As an unsponsored selectee, it is possible to be randomly assigned to a squadron based on the needs of the Air Force at any time between inprocessing and assignment night of UPT. However, you have two and a half years or more to secure a sponsorship from the time you are selected by the RCP-R to track select at UPT.

Note that the RCP-R is currently an option, but this is not guaranteed to remain an option. If you do join AFROTC it is highly recommended that you be prepared to serve on Active Duty. This program is still

newer, so do not be alarmed if your Cadre members do not know about it or how it works; it will be a learning experience for everyone.

As an AFROTC Cadet earning squadron sponsorship brings unique challenges. In general, as college students Cadets do not have unlimited funds to travel the country and [rush](#)/interview with squadrons. If you are interested in applying to the program, be aware that you will be responsible for the time, effort, and money it takes to earn sponsorship. Additionally, many of the Reserve squadrons still do not know about this program and will have a lot of questions about it.

I may be biased, but I do believe that despite the hard work up front, this program absolutely is worth it. I was selected alongside 12 other Cadets for this program and most of them have already or will be beginning UPT before December of this year, while those that we did AFROTC with and are going the AD route will be waiting until April of next year or later to begin training.

*There have been a select few cadets in the past who have been selected by the RCP-R, found sponsorship with ANG squadrons, and were released from the AFRC to the ANG. These were special circumstances, do **not** expect the AFRC to release you to the ANG.

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Air National Guard

Commissioning out of AFROTC into the Air National Guard is again not a very common or traditional route. It is certainly NOT guaranteed to be an option, but it is possible and has been done in the past. Essentially, if you are interested in applying directly to ANG squadrons, you will be applying like other candidates off the street.

Coming from AFROTC may be an advantage for you for ANG squadrons as you will get a commission and security clearance in AFROTC (and may get a Flight Physical depending on what your AD job selection is). Some squadrons may find these things beneficial while other squadrons will not really understand what it means to commission from AFROTC and join the Guard. It will likely be a learning process for both you and the squadrons you apply for.

If you decide to go this route and do get hired by an ANG squadron, you will need to work with your AFROTC Cadre and HQ AFROTC to get permission to be released from your AD commitment upon commissioning and transition to an ANG commitment. If you choose to go this route and have received an AFROTC scholarship, your scholarship may be impacted, speak with your Cadre about possible ramifications. HQ AFROTC has allowed Guard hires to commission into the Guard in the past, but again, this is not guaranteed. If HQ AFROTC does release you to the ANG, upon commissioning you will work with your Guard squadron to swear in, get IFT dates (if necessary), and get UPT dates.

So, there you have it, how to become a pilot in the United States Air Force through AFROTC. The process seems long and daunting, but I can assure you nothing is more gratifying than hard work paying off, commissioning, earning a pilot slot, and finding sponsorship with the squadron of your dreams.

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My Experience, Lessons Learned, and Advice

This section of the article will describe my experience with the RCP-R program and earning a sponsorship in excruciating detail, as well as what I have learned and advice for those interested. As mentioned in the previous article, I was a four-year AFROTC Cadet who recently commissioned. When I began AFROTC I just knew that I wanted to serve and was hoping for the opportunity to fly.

After my freshman year I was selected to attend Ops AF where I spent three weeks at an Air Force Base shadowing various career fields with 20 other AFROTC Cadets from different detachments around the country. The base I went to has a fighter wing and after getting the opportunity to shadow some of the pilots, visit their range to see jets in action, and “pet the jet,” I knew that was the job for me and I have been dead set on becoming a fighter pilot ever since. I spent most of my free time after Ops AF trying to figure out how I was going to earn a pilot slot and in turn become a fighter pilot.



U.S. Air Force

Capt. Kyle Benham (right), 62nd Fighter Squadron (FS) F-35A Lightning II fighter jet pilot, talks to another Airman after landing in Red Flag 19-2 at Nellis Air Force Base, Nev., March 9, 2019. Benham started flying fighter jets in the summer of 2012 after graduating from Brigham Young University (BYU) and attending Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC). (U.S. Air Force photo by Airman 1st Class Bryan Guthrie)

My sophomore year of college and AFROTC, one of my AFROTC mentors was applying to a fighter guard unit. I had no idea what that meant, but I was interested. When I learned that he was directly applying to fly fighters I was hooked, I genuinely did not know that was possible. After that, I began looking into the Guard/Reserve myself and started contacting fighter squadrons. I got an overwhelmingly negative response from most places telling me that I was too far off from graduating to rush their squadron or that since I was contracted in AFROTC I would never be allowed to go Guard. It definitely was sad to hear, but I did not stop working at it.

In the Fall semester of my Junior/AS300 year, a different AFROTC mentor of mine sent me a text that quite literally changed my life. He had commissioned the previous year as a Gold Bar Recruiter, and he received an email about a small program where Cadets could apply to commission into the Air Force Reserve. The text he sent me simply said “I remember you looking into the Reserve, are you still interested? Not sure if you have seen this announcement but thought I would share.” ...I had not heard of this program.

I immediately sent an email to my AFROTC Cadre members and asked what was going on and if it was real. My cadre looked into it and turns out it was the RCP-R program. I had two weeks to get everything together to apply as well as decide if this was something I actually wanted to do. When I applied to this

program it was only the second year it was offered, so there was hardly any information available about it. I found someone on Reddit that had done the program, asked him for some of the details, and decided to apply because I figured I had nothing to lose.

After a few agonizing months of waiting, my Cadre called me into my Commander's office, which actually had me freaking out. They made up a whole story and had me read a memorandum, I definitely thought I was in trouble. The last page of the memorandum was the selection results from the RCP-R program with my name highlighted and I could not believe it was real; in the Fall of my AS300/Junior year I was selected to attend Undergraduate Pilot Training.

While in that moment I felt a huge amount of excitement and relief, I had no idea what was to come. I was selected as an unsponsored candidate, so the next day I was already reaching out to Reserve squadrons with a UPT slot in hand trying to explain my situation. Prior to being selected I had done a bunch of research on what squadrons I was interested in. I found out that *at the time* only four Reserve fighter squadrons hired for UPT, with one of the squadrons hiring about every three years.

I knew it was a long shot, but I was going to do everything I could to try and secure a fighter sponsorship. I learned very quickly how much work went into finding squadron contact information, actually being able to get in contact with them, and putting together application packages. As a fulltime college student STEM major in AFROTC, I was in over my head.

The following semester I took the semester "off" of AFROTC while I studied abroad in Europe, definitely not good timing for trying to earn a sponsorship. I do not regret studying abroad one bit, however, looking back I could have used that time and money to rush squadrons. While I was abroad, I kept emailing every squadron I could and kept trying to make connections.

At a certain point, I realized that I was just not a candidate for fighter squadrons. Despite me having a guaranteed UPT slot in hand, a high GPA, and some great letters of recommendation, my AFOQT and [PCSM Scores](#) were not cutting it, I did not have a PPL (in fact I only had 7 flight hours), and at the time I did not realize it, but my resume and cover letter needed some work. I was not about to give up on my dream of [flying fighters](#), but I knew I needed to expand my horizons.

When I returned from studying abroad, I went on a trip to rush some squadrons. I flew across the country and rented a car to visit four different places, a fighter squadron and a few other squadrons with different jets and missions. Long story short, one of the places I went (not a fighter squadron) I had not been able to get in contact with despite calling every day for a month and emailing a few different times. I knew they were having a UTA weekend and I had access to the base as a contracted AFROTC Cadet.

Basically, I showed up on base, stalked some dudes in flight suits with the squadron patch, one of which ended up being the Squadron Commander (yikes), and walked up to them and explained my situation. They sent me to the squadron to hang out and somehow the next day I had an interview. This was truly a crazy experience and while I ended up getting an interview, I do not recommend trying this anywhere.

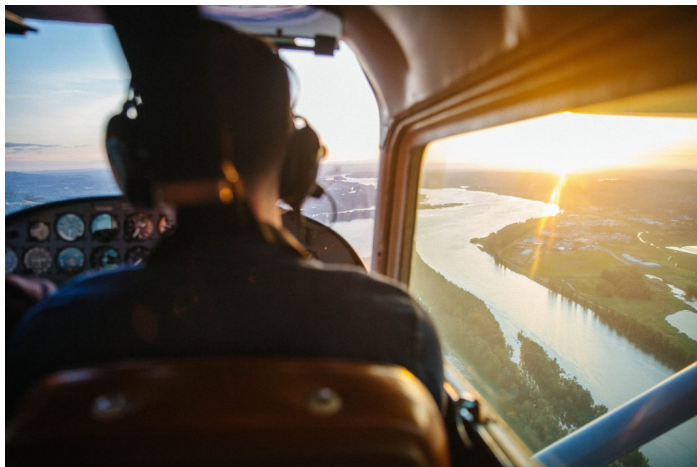
You should absolutely speak with squadrons prior to showing up. I had absolutely no intentions of interviewing and was far from prepared. This interview was basically me sitting in a chair in front of 40 pilots who all just threw questions at me. I ended up feeling pretty good about the interview, and I was called in by the Chief Pilot moments after. They told me that it wasn't a no, I could have a job there if I wanted it, but they wanted to make sure it is where I wanted to be. With that in mind, I continued on the journey of going for a fighter squadron.

I spent every day (and lots of money that I really didn't have) for the next 8 weeks at my local airport to earn my PPL. When I landed from my PPL check ride and my DPE congratulated me, I was extremely excited (and kind of shocked). I had no intentions to earn my PPL a few months before that but am so happy I did because while I wait for UPT, I can still go fly. Now that I had the PPL and more flight hours, my PCSM Score boosted to 69 (nice). I continued to reach out to fighter squadrons and try to rush.

I had plans to rush one squadron on my trip back to my college after that summer, at this point it was looking like the last Reserve fighter squadron I would be able to apply for. While I was on my way there, I got an email from one of the pilots that I was not competitive and I would not receive an interview, so I should not waste my time rushing. I was crushed.

While I was grateful, they let me know so I didn't waste my time and money, I thought my dream was over. It was that day that I called my AFROTC Cadre and asked to be scheduled to retake the AFOQT.

In AFROTC, it does not really matter what your AFOQT scores are as long as you pass. The pilot score is important, but generally does not need to be as high as it does for Guard/Reserve fighter squadrons. When I took the AFOQT the first time, I did relatively well and got a pilot score in the 70s with no prior aviation knowledge and minimal studying; I was content. This time I studied really hard and ended up crushing the AFOQT, raising my PCSM more than 20 points.



Don't underestimate the power of earning your Private Pilot License when trying to raise your PCSM score!

Now I was competitive for fighter squadrons but did not know who was hiring at that point. That was around the time I discovered [BogiDope](#) and job listings. I knew I was supposed to only apply to Reserve squadrons but decided to also apply to some Guard fighter squadrons that I saw were hiring.

I was sitting in the library studying for finals when I got an email with the news that I was selected to interview at a fighter squadron. I was extremely shocked to have received an interview from that squadron and could not have been any more excited. I knew I needed to be prepared for the interview and any that I might get in the future, so [I did the Combo Package with BogiDope](#) and it truly set me up for success. I did not end up getting hired by the first fighter squadron I interviewed with despite feeling very strong about this interview. In fact, during the interview one of the pilots even asked if I had done interview prep. The pilot that called me to let me know that I was not selected told me "it isn't a question of if, it's when you become a fighter pilot." This feedback had me conflicted, what had I done wrong?

I was upset about it for a while, but knew I had to keep going. At this point commissioning was just a few months out. I knew I needed to secure a sponsorship to eliminate the possibility of getting randomly assigned, so I started rushing some heavy units that I was interested in. It was awesome, I met some really great pilots, and I learned a ton about what was to come at UPT and beyond. While I enjoyed my time with these squadrons and knew I could have an amazing career at any one of them, something inside me just told me I had to keep trying for fighters; I could not get it out of my head "it isn't a question of if, it's when you become a fighter pilot." At this point, the pandemic started, squadrons stopped allowing rushing, and interviews were postponed. I definitely thought my fighter dream was gone at that point.

I finished out my senior year of college and last semester of AFROTC on Zoom. I commissioned a few days later and was waiting to inprocess with the 340 FTG, while hoping to hear back from a few squadrons. I noticed that my hometown guard fighter squadron posted that they were holding a hiring board, I had not considered applying to them in the past since they were guard, but it really was my dream squadron. I had never rushed there and was not expecting much, but it was worth one final shot at fighters. Against all odds, I got an interview.

The next week I inprocessed with the Reserve and knew I had to find a Reserve sponsorship. The interview with the guard squadron was the week following inprocessing, but I could not pass up the opportunity, so I went. I felt intimidated while I was there because everyone else interviewing had rushed the squadron multiple times, some people for years. I interviewed and the next day I was awakened from a nap by a call from the Squadron Commander congratulating me that I had been selected by their squadron.

I was elated, this was my dream and it was happening, I could not believe it. At this point I was pretty uncertain what to do since I was commissioned from AFROTC, I just inprocessed with the Reserve, and now I was hired by a Guard unit. I contacted the Reserve and they have graciously released me to the ANG; I am currently waiting to begin UPT. While it feels like I have worked extremely hard these last two years to gain sponsorship, the hard work has not even begun. I am far from [being a fighter pilot](#), but extremely excited for the opportunity and experiences ahead.



Things worth looking forward to!

So, what have I learned along the way and what advice do I have? Know what you are getting into if you are interested in applying for the RCP-R program. If your dream is to fly fighters, I might encourage you to

stay the AD route or apply to ANG squadrons independently. If your dream is to just fly anything for the USAF and live a more flexible lifestyle than AD, I strongly encourage you to apply to the RCP-R!

A PPL is not a requirement for the program, but it has proven to be more challenging to gain a sponsorship from any Reserve unit without one, [so consider this](#). Keep in mind that you could be placed randomly into any Reserve squadron that is undermanned. If this does not bother you, this program is awesome.

I will say, I know more people that have been placed in their dream squadron from this program than not, but the possibility is there. As with most things, knowing people in the right places can get you a long way in terms of unit sponsorship. If this program interests you, I highly suggest making connections with squadrons that interest you early on. Rushing is very important to many squadrons, show up if the opportunity arises.

If I learned anything from this experience it has been that you have to be proactive. No one will care about your career as much as you will. It will be a lot of work up front but being a part of this program exposed me to so much more than I could have imagined. Spending many weekends away from my college campus rushing/interviewing with squadrons allowed me to gain a greater understanding of the Air Force, what it meant to be an Air Force Pilot, what I could expect in my future, and many different leadership qualities. These experiences have been truly priceless and make all of the hard work, time, and money more than worth it.

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Image Credits:

This post's feature image shows Boston University Air Force ROTC cadets getting an F-15 tour at the 104th Fighter Wing: <https://www.dvidshub.net/image/4849599/104th-fighter-wing-hosts-boston-university-air-force-rotc-detachment-335>.

The ENJJPT T-38 blasting off at night is from: <https://www.dvidshub.net/image/1020253/enjjpt-training>.

F-35 pilots debriefing: <https://www.dvidshub.net/image/5199802/pilots-first-red-flag-experience-nellis>.

Lt suiting up in the CBM chute shop: <https://www.dvidshub.net/image/4797158/student-pilot-showcases-paintings-columbus-art-walk>.

The pilot flying the Cessna was photographed by [Avel Chuklanov](#) from [Unsplash](#).

F-15E: <https://www.dvidshub.net/image/5256301/492nd-madhatters>.

The Pilot Candidate Selection Method (PCSM) Score Explained – Part 1

By [Bogidope](#)

While it's true that the Air Force, Guard, and Reserve use the "whole person concept" in selecting pilot applicants, there's no denying that objective indicators of aptitude are also greatly important. Your undergraduate GPA and your Air Force Officer Qualifying Test ([AFOQT](#)) scores ([Bogidope AFOQT article](#)) are two of the main aptitude-related pieces of the selection criteria, but there's also another aptitude score that matters for rated applicants – the Pilot Candidate Selection Method (PCSM) score.

What is a PCSM Score?

The PCSM scoring system was developed by the Air Force in 1993 as a composite method of gauging the aviation aptitude of applicants. Possible scores range from 1 to 99, with each point representing a percentile ranking compared against a reference group. A PCSM score is calculated by utilizing an applicant's AFOQT Pilot subscore, amount of logged flight time (including dual instruction), and grading data from the Test of Basic Aviation Skills (TBAS). The calculations used to produce the score are proprietary information and are kept confidential. PCSM scores are not required for non-rated applicants and they do not have to take the TBAS.

Air Education and Training Command (AETC) conducted analyses in 1997 and 1998 and concluded that there is a strong correlation between higher PCSM scores and increased completion rates among pilot trainees for Phase II of Undergraduate Pilot Training (UPT) in the T-37 Tweet (now replaced by the T-6 Texan II). Each analysis produced extremely similar success rates. The approximate figures are shown below.

PCSM Score Range	UPT Phase II Completion Rate
1 – 25	58%
26 – 50	70%
51 – 75	82%
76 – 99	92%

Although the PCSM score is an important factor in getting selected for a pilot slot, the Air Force does not currently have a minimum PCSM score requirement for applicants. [Update: the minimum PCSM score is 10]. However, some Guard and Reserve units maintain minimum requirements as a way of pre-screening for competitive applicants.

What is the TBAS?

The **Test of Basic Aviation Skills (TBAS)** is a performance-based test that is administered via computer with the use of a joystick, a set of rudder pedals, and headphones. It is a vital component of the PCSM algorithm. It replaced the Basic Attributes Test (BAT) in 2006 – a similar test which ran on comparatively antiquated software and also included a section with questions designed to judge personality attributes. The TBAS is designed to assess the applicant's spatial perception ability, short-term memory, hand/eye coordination, fine motor skills, and multitasking ability. This specific grading data is not provided to the applicant nor any selection boards – it is simply utilized as a part of the PCSM score algorithm.

The TBAS is comprised of a Directional Orientation Test, a Horizontal Tracking Test, an Airplane Tracking Test, a combined Airplane and Horizontal Tracking Test, and a Multi-Tasking Test. Descriptions of each test are below.

Directional Orientation Test

This section assesses your spatial perception ability. It is somewhat similar in concept to the Instrument Comprehension subtest on the AFOQT.

The idea behind this section is that you are controlling a UAV and are being instructed to identify a single parking lot out of a group of four, which are arranged in a diamond shape. The software presents a simple image of a map with a compass rose, which always shows North pointing towards the top of the map. The map image contains a yellow triangle-shaped arrow and an adjacent red dot. The smaller, pointed end of the arrow indicates the direction your UAV is facing. The red dot is also located just beyond the pointed end of the arrow and serves as another indicator of your UAV's focal point. On another part of the screen, you will simultaneously be presented with an image intended to represent the first-person view from the UAV. This image contains gray squares which represent the parking lots. Through the headphones, a voice recording will be played which instructs you to select a parking lot which is located in a particular geographic location (for example: "Image the West parking lot"). Your job is to look at the map view and determine which direction your UAV is facing, then quickly look at the first-person view and determine which parking lot is located the furthest in the direction that the voice instructs, and then click on it. As soon as the voice stops speaking, a timer will begin and your reaction time will be recorded.

After clicking on a parking lot, you will immediately be notified whether or not your answer was correct. It is critical to not allow yourself to get flustered by incorrect answers. It is also important to avoid focusing too much on the timer or you may begin rushing and answering incorrectly. It is better to take an extra few seconds to answer correctly rather than getting too anxious and answering incorrectly but quickly.

[CLICK HERE FOR EXAMPLE](#)

In the above example, the UAV is facing Southwest. You have been instructed to identify the East parking lot. From this perspective, East is located to your rear left. To correctly answer, you would click on the rear left parking lot (choice C).

You can prepare for this section by using these [TBAS flashcards](#). The presentation on the TBAS is most similar to the flashcards which show a map overlay, but the plain flashcards are still useful for practicing the mental technique.

Horizontal Tracking Test

This section analyzes your basic fine motor skills and hand/eye coordination.

The software displays a narrow horizontal section of space at the bottom of the screen. A red aircraft icon will move left and right along this space in a random fashion, quickly changing direction with no warning. A yellow box will also be visible in this section of horizontal space. Pressing on the rudder pedals will control the location of this yellow box. Your job is to constantly "track" the aircraft icon by keeping it inside the yellow box. While you're successfully tracking the aircraft, the box will turn green. As the test continues, the speed of the aircraft icon's movement increases.

[CLICK HERE FOR EXAMPLE](#)

An official screenshot of the Horizontal Tracking Test.

Airplane Tracking Test

This section is similar in concept to the Horizontal Tracking Test. It measures more advanced fine motor skills and hand/eye coordination.

The software looks almost identical to Horizontal Tracking Test, but you will be looking at most of the screen instead of a narrow horizontal section. This time, the red aircraft icon will move all around the screen rather than just left and right. You'll use a joystick to move a yellow targeting reticle icon around the screen. The objective is to react quickly to changes in the red aircraft icon's movement and to keep the targeting reticle over it as much as possible. The targeting reticle will turn green while you are successfully tracking the red aircraft icon. The speed of the aircraft icon's movement increases at various points throughout the test. Another challenging aspect is that the joystick's Y-axis is inverted, meaning that you will need to push the joystick forward to move the targeting reticle down the screen and vice versa.

[CLICK HERE FOR EXAMPLE](#)

An official screenshot of the Airplane Tracking Test.

Airplane and Horizontal Tracking Test

This section is simply the previous two sections combined. It measures advanced fine motor skills, hand/eye coordination, and multitasking ability.

[CLICK HERE FOR EXAMPLE](#)

An official screenshot of the combined Airplane and Horizontal Tracking Test

It is difficult to truly prepare for any of the tracking tests, but flight simulator experience may help. If you've never used a joystick or rudder pedals before, it would be a good idea to purchase a set and start developing a feel for making those kinds of control inputs. The Red Bull Stunt Course mission in the Microsoft Flight Simulator X: Acceleration Pack is a good way to get used to performing fast, drastic control inputs somewhat like the ones you'll need to make during the [TBAS tracking tests](#).

Multi-Tasking Test

As the name implies, this section measures your multitasking ability. You'll be performing 4 simultaneous tasks which seem easy individually but are very challenging to manage all at once.

The software divides the screen into 4 sections. Each section has an individual module score visible at all times. If you concentrate primarily on one section, its module score will increase, but you will lose points on the other sections. Module scores can move in either direction – if you perform well on one module and then begin neglecting it, you will start to lose the points you had gained. Because of this, trying to excel at one or two particular modules while mostly neglecting the other ones is not a good tactic. You need to keep your attention as divided as possible.

You will have an opportunity to practice each module individually before the Multi-Tasking Test begins. During the test, you'll perform the multitasking operations continuously for a few minutes at a time. You will then have an opportunity to take a short mental break before another session begins. The module scores reset with each session.

[CLICK HERE FOR EXAMPLE](#)

An official screenshot of the Multi-Tasking Test.

Module 1

The first module will display a group of letters for approximately 10 seconds. After this, one individual letter will be displayed at a time and you'll be required to click on a large checkmark if that particular letter was included in the previously displayed group of letters, or click on an "X" mark if it wasn't. A correct answer will increase your module score and an incorrect answer will decrease it. If you do not answer

within a certain amount of time, your module score will also decrease. After answering a few of these questions, a new group of letters will be presented and the process will start over.

If you're creative and have a reasonably large vocabulary that you can recall quickly, it may be a good idea to try to create a mnemonic device in your head as you read each group of letters. For instance, for the group of letters "ISKELOPU", the nonsensical phrase "I'm Skydiving, Keep Educating Little Orange Pandas Underwater" could be quickly created and placed into your short-term memory, making it easier to recall the group of letters. Another technique is to identify pronounceable syllables within the group of letters and memorize those sounds rather than their individual letters. With the previous example, you could remember the sounds "Is Kel Opu" and cut down your memorization workload by more than half (3 sounds instead of 8 letters). Of course, not every group of letters will be made up entirely of pronounceable syllables but it is likely that many groups will have at least one, which can save you from having to remember at least a few letters. This online [game](#) also provides good practice.

Module 2

The second module requires you to perform 3-digit addition and subtraction within a fairly short time limit. Rather than typing in the answers, the numbers 0 through 9 are displayed on screen and you must click on the correct number for each digit and then click the Submit button. However, if the answer is greater than a certain amount, you can simply click on the button that says "Greater Than XXXX" (on the real test, XXXX will be an unchanging number). You will not receive a pencil or scratch paper, and even if you were able to solve these problems by writing them out, you'd be wasting a lot of time and your other module scores would suffer. If you're not comfortable with performing this type of arithmetic mentally, the [Mental Math Cards iOS App](#) is a great way to prepare.

Module 3

The third module is extremely simple. A generic gauge is displayed that is shaped like a semicircle. There is a moderately sized green-colored zone in the middle of the gauge, two small yellow-colored zones to the outsides of the green zone, and two large red-colored zones to the outsides of the yellow zones. Each Multi-Tasking Test session will begin with the gauge's needle perfectly centered in the green zone. As seconds pass, the needle will begin falling to the left or right side of the gauge. As the needle falls towards the small yellow zones, you will score more points until it reaches a red zone, at which you will start to lose points. Clicking on the gauge will immediately reset it, and the needle will go back to its original centered position in the green zone.

Resetting the gauge only while the needle is in a yellow zone will net you the most points for this module, but since the yellow zones are very small, it only takes a short period of time until the needle has moved past a yellow zone and into a red zone. This introduces an element of risk vs. reward. If you reset the gauge constantly and do not allow the needle to fall very close to a red zone, the risk of losing points is low, but you will not gain a large amount of points. If you try to maximize your points by waiting until the gauge is in a yellow zone each time before resetting it, the risk of losing points is high because you may not be able to divide your attention well enough to reset the gauge during the short time window, but if you are successful, you can gain a large amount of points.

Module 4

Module 4 adds auditory information into the mix. Before the Multi-Tasking Test begins, the instructions will state your assigned call sign. During each session, you will frequently hear simulated Air Traffic Control (ATC) radio chatter in your headphones. Occasionally, ATC will instruct you (by your call sign) to change to one of 4 radio channels. These channels are represented on screen by icons labeled 1 through 4. When you are instructed to change channels, simply click on the appropriate icon and you will gain points. However, if you ignore the instruction or click on the wrong channel button, you will lose points. Throughout the session, ATC will also be giving instructions to other call signs – some of which sound very similar to yours. If you respond to an instruction that was not intended for you, you will also lose points. When you hear an instruction for your call sign, it should take top priority. Stop what you're doing and click on the appropriate channel button, then return your focus to the other modules.

Conclusion

Ok so now you understand the background and how important the PCSM score is to your [chances of getting selected to UPT](#). These tests are not to be taken lightly. Educate yourself and study early and often. Don't jeopardize a phenomenal career and retirement because of lack of information or lack of preparation. In the next [PCSM article BogiDope](#) will explain how to take the test, the scoring system and what (outside of studying) you can do to better your scores. Remember its our goal to make you informed. Now it's your turn to start the process and go take some tests.

Note: this article was written using multiple different sources. These sources include, the Pilot Candidate Selection Method website, prep books for the AFOQT test, USAF AFPC Official [AFOQT Form T Prep Course](#) and multiple phone calls to understand the process.

The Pilot Candidate Selection Method (PCSM) Score Explained – Part 2

By [Bogidope](#)

In Part 1 of our two part series “The [Pilot Candidate Selection Method \(PCSM\) Score Explained](#)” [BogiDope](#) explained the background, importance and how to study for the PCSM. In Part 2, BogiDope will educate you on the how to maximize your PCSM score which will significantly increase your chances of [obtaining an Undergraduate Pilot Training \(UPT\) slot](#).

Where Can I Take the Test of Basic Aviation Skills (TBAS)?

The TBAS is administered at many Air Force bases, Air Force Reserve bases, Air National Guard bases, and Air Force ROTC detachments. A list of testing locations and contact information can be found on the official [PCSM website](#). If you are a civilian, your recruiter can schedule the test for you, but they may require you to take the AFOQT first in order to judge your competitiveness. AFROTC detachments are sometimes willing to facilitate tests for those who are not cadets. It's worth a shot to respectfully contact a nearby detachment to request a testing session if you are applying to Guard/Reserve units or if your recruiter is currently too busy to schedule one for you.

How Many Times Can I Take the TBAS?

The TBAS can be taken a total of two times {June 2021 update: 3 times}, but the second attempt must be at least 180 days [June 2021 update: 90 dyas] after the first attempt. Waivers for additional retests are not a possibility. If you retake the TBAS, your second [last] attempt is the one that counts, even if you do worse and your PCSM score decreases. It is unlikely that you would do worse on your second attempt, but it would be a good idea to cancel your test appointment if you end up sick, sleep-deprived, distressed, hungover, etc. on the day you're scheduled to retest.

How Can I Look Up My PCSM Score?

You can retrieve your PCSM score on the official [PCSM website](#) by entering your first name, your initials, and the last 4 digits of your social security number. To receive a PCSM score, you must take both the AFOQT and the TBAS. If you have not yet taken one of those, you will not have a PCSM score yet. After you have taken both tests and a PCSM score has been generated, your recruiter will likely be notified automatically if you're applying for Officer Training School. AFROTC cadre members are also generally notified automatically of PCSM scores for cadets. If you're applying to a Guard or Reserve unit, you will need to retrieve the score sheet yourself via the link above and send it to the unit as a part of your application package.

What Is a Good PCSM Score?

Competitive PCSM scores vary depending on the type of selection board.

PCSM scores tend to be very important for Guard and Reserve units because they hire small numbers of pilots at a time, so they want to be extremely assured that their selectees will not wash out of pilot training. It is not uncommon for units to require a minimum PCSM score to be achieved in order to even apply for their pilot selection boards. Some fighter units explicitly state that they consider PCSM scores in the 90s to be competitive. However, heavy units tend to be more forgiving. Many applicants with PCSM scores in the 60s and 70s have reported being selected by heavy units.

Air Force Reserve Command sometimes posts official statistics for their [unsponsored rated selection boards](#). For the first board of fiscal year 2016 (16-01), the average PCSM score of pilot selectees was 81.3.

Officer Training School (OTS) rated selection boards generally look at more comprehensive applicant profiles than what Guard and Reserve units require for their application packages, so the whole person concept is a little more prevalent and the importance of PCSM is slightly diminished. Research on a fairly small sample size of 48 pilot selectees from OTS selection boards for fiscal years 2015 through 2017 showed a minimum PCSM score of 38, a median of 63, and an average of 66.

Air Force ROTC generally receives the second-most rated slots each year. AFROTC cadets are also ranked based on a larger variety of factors in comparison to Guard/Reserve and OTS applicants, such as PFT scores, Field Training ranking, and order of merit ranking. Because rated slots are generally plentiful and there are a greater number of criteria for ranking cadets, PCSM scores do not seem to carry quite as much importance for AFROTC cadets.

Air Force Academy rated selection boards seem to be the most lax about PCSM scores, likely because the Academy usually receives the most rated slots each year. Academy cadets are also likely to perform favorably throughout their education due to the high level of competition involved in getting accepted to the Academy to begin with, so most cadets who are eligible to apply for rated slots have pretty good chances of being selected.

PCSM 1.0 vs. PCSM 2.0

The PCSM scoring algorithm was updated in 2013. The new algorithm is sometimes called “PCSM 2.0”. The older algorithm appeared to weigh AFOQT scores and TBAS (or BAT) performance fairly heavily but flight hours lightly. Flight hours could add up to 10 points (at the 201+ hour mark) to a PCSM 1.0 score. Applicants were able to obtain scores in the 80s or 90s with little to no flight time if they did well on the AFOQT and the TBAS/BAT. However, the updated algorithm has a heavy emphasis on flight time. Many applicants without much flight time reported seeing their PCSM scores drop between 10 to 50 points once the updated algorithm was launched. Flying hours can now boost scores by very large amounts, but those without the means to accrue much flight time are now at a disadvantage even if they perform well on the AFOQT and the TBAS. Empirical evidence seems to indicate that a PCSM score of approximately 70 is now the highest achievable with no flying hours. As a result of this algorithm update, PCSM 2.0 scores tend to be significantly lower on average.

How Do Flight Hours Influence PCSM Score?

As mentioned above, flight hours now have a huge impact on PCSM scores. However, you do not receive a score boost for every single hour of flight time you obtain. Instead, points are awarded based on flight hour brackets. The amount of points each bracket is worth differs somewhat for each applicant, but it is generally around 4 or 5 points per bracket. The brackets are shown below.

- 0 hours
- 1 – 5 hours
- 6 – 10 hours
- 11 – 20 hours

21 – 40 hours
41 – 60 hours
61 – 80 hours
81 – 100 hours
101 – 200 hours
201 hours and up

As you can see, there are diminishing returns on investment since the bracket sizes go from roughly 5 hours to 10 hours to 20 hours – and then 100 hours towards the end of the scale. When you retrieve your PCSM score from the [PCSM website](#), you will be provided with a chart that shows what your score would be for each bracket above the one you are currently in.

The flight time component of the PCSM only considers the number of hours logged and nothing more. It does not take into account aeronautical ratings, aircraft type, takeoff/landing counts, or flight type (VFR/IFR). Dual instruction time can be counted if the training is provided by a licensed CFI. Simulator time is not counted, even if used for IFR training.

When you take the TBAS, you will be required to bring your logbook with you if you have any flight time. You will also notate your flight time on an information sheet filled out prior to the test. The person administering the test will make a copy of the last two pages of your logbook and send it to Air Force Personnel Command (AFPC) so that they can include the flight time in your PCSM score calculation. If you obtain more flight time after taking the TBAS, your recruiter or flight instructor must [write and sign a letter](#) which includes your social security number and vouches for the authenticity of your logbook. You must also sign this letter yourself. This letter and a copy of the last 2 pages of your logbook can then be e-mailed to the [PCSM office](#). Once AFPC approves and processes the additional flight time, your new score can be retrieved from the [PCSM website](#). This generally takes only a few business days.

How Can I Improve My PCSM Score?

As mentioned previously, the PCSM score is calculated by utilizing your AFOQT Pilot subscore, your TBAS grading data, and your logged flight time. If you are not satisfied with your PCSM score, you have the ability to change any or all of those things.

You can take the AFOQT twice without a waiver if you wait 150 days between attempts [June 2021 update, 90 days] , and a waiver authorizing a third attempt is a possibility. Improving your Pilot subscore will automatically improve your PCSM score. The PCSM scoring system is integrated with the AFOQT scoring system – no action is required on your part to receive a new PCSM score once you've retaken the AFOQT.

You can take the TBAS twice [update, 3x], but you must wait 180 days [update, 90 days] between attempts. Waivers for retests are not authorized. Although it is impossible to ascertain exactly how well you performed on the TBAS since the grading information is not revealed, some combinations may indicate the TBAS is probably the culprit for a lackluster PCSM score. For example, a mediocre PCSM score with a high AFOQT Pilot subscore and a significant amount of flight hours likely indicates that your TBAS performance was poor.

If you have already used all of your AFOQT and TBAS attempts, accumulating more flight hours can lead to a huge improvement in your PCSM score. For that matter, even if you ace the AFOQT and the TBAS, the PCSM 2.0 scoring algorithm will prevent you from having an extremely competitive score if you don't have much flight time. If you have the money to invest in flying, this option is your best bet. Selection board members also tend to look specifically at your flight time. Some applicants dream about flying their entire life only to discover that it's not for them once they try it, so a significant amount of experience is favorable because it shows that you are still interested after experiencing the reality of flying. Board

members could also be inclined to believe that civilian flying experience indicates you could be more proficient during UPT than someone without much flight time, and therefore you pose a lower attrition risk.

How Should I Move Forward After Getting My PCSM Score?

Obtaining a PCSM score means you've already taken the AFOQT and the TBAS, so pat yourself on the back and be glad that you've gotten through arguably the two most nerve-racking parts of application process. But the rest of your application is also incredibly important, so don't get too comfortable yet.

If you're happy with your scores, you can shift your efforts to getting the more subjective parts of your application in order. If you're applying to a Guard/Reserve unit or for Officer Training School, you'll likely need to have a resume (often called an Applicant Profile), a motivational statement or cover letter, and at least 3 letters of recommendation. If you haven't already done so, think of people who know you well and reach out to them to respectfully ask for a letter of recommendation. It might help to type the first drafts yourself and have them modified as needed. Reflect on your past achievements and create a resume that highlights your leadership ability and your accomplishments. Think about why you want to serve and what unique value you can bring to the military as an officer, and communicate those things clearly and concisely in your motivational statement or cover letter. Solicit feedback on all these things from peers, other applicants, and any military officers that you might know personally. If you're an AFROTC or Air Force Academy cadet, stay in shape and try to achieve maximum PFT scores, take initiative around the detachment often to secure a competitive order of merit ranking, and prepare for Field Training so that you can graduate in the top third of your class. These factors are all part of the selection criteria for a pilot slot. Once you've got all that squared away and have made it through the mountains of paperwork typically required to complete an application, submit it and try not to drive yourself crazy waiting for the results.

If you aren't happy with your PCSM score, it might be a good idea to go ahead and get your application completed and submitted anyway if a selection board is coming up soon. Retaking tests may be beneficial, but you'll have to wait 150 days to retake the AFOQT and 180 days to retake the TBAS, so a shot at a selection board may pass you by if you decide not to apply until you've had the chance to improve your score. But if you've got a fair amount of time until the application deadline and some money to burn, there's no waiting period for updating your flight hours with the PCSM office, so start racking up those hours. But keep in mind that aptitude scores and flight time aren't everything. You may end up getting selected even if you don't feel you're especially competitive, so don't stress yourself out if you don't have the time or the money to chase a higher score. Make the rest of your application outstanding, submit it, and keep your fingers crossed! As Wayne Gretzky famously said, "You miss 100% of the shots you don't take."

BogiDope is dedicated to helping you succeed in your [aviation career](#). Armed with BogiDope's guidance on the PCSM and AFOQT you can be confident starting your quest towards becoming a pilot in the Air Force, Air National Guard or Air Force Reserve. Good luck!