

# ASSOCIATION OF GRADUATES

## UNITED STATES AIR FORCE ACADEMY



October 24, 2007

Board of Directors  
Association of Graduates  
3116 Academy Drive  
USAF Academy, CO 80840

Members of the Board,

I am forwarding the CAS white paper "USAF AOG Goals: An Assessment by the AOG Class Advisory Senate" for your consideration. It is an information document rather than an action document. It is offered in the hope that it will be of use to the Board as it considers the way forward for the AOG. The CAS believes that any road map of the way forward must begin with an assessment of where we are today. The white paper is offered in that spirit and in accordance with the Bylaws that direct the CAS to inform the Board on relevant issues.

The paper is a consensus document based upon input from AOG members through their class representatives. It was created and revised in a process involving all members of the CAS in continuous dialog with their classmates. The raw inputs reflect a wide range of views among AOG members and are based on member perceptions, which may not always be accurate. Nevertheless, they provide an insight into the feelings and attitudes of the membership. The final product was developed in accordance with the Bylaws that direct the CAS to seek members' views and to attempt to resolve differences among those views.

Respectfully,

Richard R. Sexton, '60  
President, Class Advisory Senate

Attachment: USAFA AOG Strategic Goals: An assessment by the AOG Class Advisory Senate

**USAFA AOG Strategic Goals**  
**An Assessment by the AOG Class Advisory Senate**  
**October 21, 2007**

**Purpose:** Before the AOG Class Advisory Senate (CAS) can offer sound input to the AOG Board of Directors (BOD), it is important to understand where the AOG is in terms of successes and failures. This input of assessments and recommendations is tailored to the strategic goals established by the BOD in May 2006. The assessments and recommendations have been collected by the AOG Senate from perceptions of numerous graduates. The perceptions are surprisingly uniform and deeply imbedded in the psyche of many graduates.

**The AOG Vision:** ...to be the primary organization of USAFA graduates dedicated to support the Academy mission of building leaders... and to provide service and support for graduates and cadets.

**CAS Assessment:** The vision is sound, reasonable, and a path that has been faithfully followed with identifiable success. Recent events have clouded the vision and diminished unity. Differences of opinion about the meaning of the words “support the Academy mission” are splitting financial and motivational support. There is a deep concern among graduates that differences in the BOD are more personality and ego driven rather than issue oriented. There is also a perception that some members of BOD are in the ‘transmit only’ mode and not inclined to listen to outside input. The concern is that AOG influence may be reduced rather than promoted, adversely affecting the services provided to graduates and cadets. The lack of “reasonable unity” of the BOD is the single most identifiable concern among graduates. The longer differences exist the greater the potential damage.

**CAS Recommendation:** Employ an issue driven approach. Clearly identify and prioritize where competing graduate groups agree so the BOD can find common ground and unity to move forward. Identify differences and determine whether or not the differences genuinely affect the goals. If so, resolve the issue through compromise for the sake of unity. As a final note, it is reasonable and expected for the BOD to disagree behind closed doors; but, showing unity in public would greatly help to unify the AOG membership and financial supporters.

**The AOG Mission Statement:** Working in partnership with the Academy to produce and foster graduates w/integrity, excellence and service to country...provide leadership, communications and support to graduates, and promote camaraderie...promote Academy’s heritage, traditions and accomplishments. The Bylaws also state that a core purpose of the AOG is to...raise private funds to support...Academy, cadet, and graduate programs.

**CAS Assessment:** This is an agreeable and sound mission statement graduates are eager to support. Previous well meaning efforts to impose graduate influence on character and integrity issues have backfired. Apparently this approach was seen

by the Academy leadership to be “directive” in nature and did not encourage a partnership attitude. In its relationship to the Academy the AOG functions as a consultant, albeit an influential consultant, because of ethical and funding influence its graduates possess. Attempting to impose policy and ideas cannot be successful in the organizational arrangement the AOG faces. Success by an alumni group rises out of a cooperative attitude and a persuasive approach. Graduates are hopeful that the BOD will apply this concept.

**CAS Recommendation:** The mission statement is powerful and important to graduates. The AOG must understand the tools it possesses to implement the mission. Its ability to implement the mission depends upon a positive approach to the Academy using thoughtful persuasion and financial incentive. The CAS suggests the BOD adopt a “how can we help” approach that has the proper tone to foster a “working partnership,” and go from there.

**AOG Goals:** Ten goals are listed in Section 1.5 of *The Association of Graduates Strategic Plan 2006-2011*. The goals are admirable and attainable. Clearly, attaining these goals with any measure of success requires a unified AOG. Because perceptions of “funding” are troublesome to many graduates, “critical goals” 3, 4, and 10, are addressed first and singled out for emphasis. The remaining goals are addressed in the following section.

**Critical Strategic Goals Section (goals 3, 4, and 10):**

Goal #3: Execute a major comprehensive campaign to accomplish the objectives contained in the plan, “Building Leaders of Character for Our Nation.”

**CAS Assessment:** This goal is perhaps the most controversial. Given the significant fundraising goal of the current comprehensive campaign (and potential future campaigns) the graduate community appears to be confused over the purpose and related initiatives of the campaign. Questions arise over how funding initiatives have been chosen. This is not a condemnation of the campaign. It just demonstrates the nuances and importance of communication and education graduates need/desire to ensure a successful fundraising effort.

**CAS Recommendations:** An analysis by a BOD appointed group soliciting increased input on this subject from graduates and subsequently presented to the Academy Staff for their consideration could prove very helpful. While there are groups that solely believe support should go to the Center for Character Development, the BOD and AOG staff could expand graduate understanding of the purpose of the campaign. This could be accomplished by highlighting campaign initiatives across all USAFA mission elements that demonstrate how the campaign supports the stated purpose. This is a way to reach out to splinter groups. Advertising such support can also lead to improved donations.

Goal #4: Grow Annual Fund and Sabre Society participation to support programs at the Academy not provided for by appropriated funds and to fund the capability of the AOG to accomplish its mission.

**CAS Assessment:** The Sabre Society has been a relative success story that needs re-energizing. The communication and personal touch applied to this program has great appeal but has been in decline due to AOG instability. The Annual Fund program has created uncertainty at best. Graduates and supporters have poor understanding of this program and questioned its true objectives. Some feel it was a blank check for an AOG bureaucracy which gives the AOG a bad rap.

**CAS Recommendations:** Revisit the Sabre Society program and outline the reasons for success. Ask any disaffected donors, “What would it take to bring you back?” In addition, criticism that too much influence has been exerted on the AOG by large contributors is problematic. Realistically, large contributions are important if not vital to AOG success. Most contributors want input on how their contributions are utilized, and criticizing them for that interest/desire is foolish. Disenfranchising small contributors is equally foolish. There is plenty of room for both segments of contributors to flourish if the right environment is structured.

Goal # 10: Study the desirability/feasibility and steps needed to form a foundation to accomplish Goals 3 and 4.

**CAS Assessment:** This goal may be difficult to implement! Some large donors, important if not critical to the success of an AOG foundation, have been offended to the point that they are withholding donations or forming a separate foundation(s).

**CAS Recommendations:** The BOD should apply damage assessment and control measures to regain the confidence of donors and to promote close coordination with all USAFA supporting organizations.

**Remaining Strategic Goals Section (goals 1, 2, 5-9):**

Goal #1: Among graduates, promote continuing interest in and dedication to the mission, ideals, objectives, activities and heritage of the Academy.

**CAS Assessment:** There is widespread agreement on this goal. To date, the AOG has performed admirably by adhering to the ideals outlined in this goal. The gains made may be set back if we are unable to maintain unity and cooperation. It appears there is an ongoing effort to create an integrated relationship with a foundation. The proper balance is vital.

**CAS Recommendation:** The BOD needs to determine and implement methods and approaches to reassure graduates and supporters that we are reasonably monolithic and united in our objectives. The first step is to resolve the foundation issue! The

**BOD should also establish a mechanism for how wider graduate input is applied to determine how undesignated funds are spent.**

Goal #2: Provide appropriate programs and services to support the membership, all graduates, cadets, and the Academy.

**CAS Assessment: The AOG has developed various programs and services that meet this goal. *Checkpoints*, reunion services, web sites, job fairs and cadet programs are just a few elements the AOG has provided. Donations are critical for this goal to continue and improve; a serious challenge if funding and staffing shortfalls impinge. Rightly or wrongly, there is an impression that the AOG shifted from a services attitude toward a contribution/fundraising orientation. It is not certain whether or not this impression has had any significant impact on donations. Nevertheless, there is a widely held belief that increased graduate services are highly desirable.**

**CAS Recommendations: The AOG should continue using “reach out and touch” methods to engage graduates and educate members on services already provided. Start by supporting and engaging with local chapters.**

Goal #5: Increase national recognition of the value of the Academy and its graduates.

**CAS Assessment: A worthy objective, but we need to get our AOG act together before we pursue this goal.**

**CAS Recommendation: We need a plan to advertise the successes of graduates in all professional and social fields of endeavor. Sponsoring seminars or classes to develop local, state and national leaders is a worthy goal to consider. The talent educated at the Academy is a national asset we should continue to nurture.**

Goal #6: Grow membership and facilitate mutually beneficial relationships between, among, and for graduates, cadets, the Academy and its supporters.

**CAS Assessment: A given. Publicity based upon a necessary AOG reassessment may place a charge under this goal.**

**CAS Recommendation: A thorough reassessment of the AOG as suggested throughout this document can generate considerable interest. Properly conducted and advertised, such an effort can be converted into a healthy membership drive.**

Goal #7: Encourage outstanding young people to attend the Academy, excel and graduate.

**CAS Assessment: Another given. The assessments of goals 5 and 6 also apply here.**

**CAS Recommendation: AOG success on all other strategic goals can only complement the encouragement of young people to attend and succeed at the**

**Academy. Graduate leadership by example will help build an enviable reputation that attracts and motivates the top talent.**

Goal #8: Select, recruit and retain executive staff to accomplish the goals outlined in this plan.

**CAS Assessment: This is a goal that must not be overlooked and will be scrutinized by the membership. Donations will be greatly impacted by its outcome. The BOD must carefully navigate this issue. The reputation recently gained because of graduate controversy will challenge staff members. Uncertainty is unsettling to the AOG staff and good talent may be lost and costly to replace.**

**CAS Recommendations: Haste makes waste, but clearly, timing is critical. Delays in confronting issues and dragging out decision making will undermine the AOG staff and render them far less effective. We need a confident and invigorated staff to carry out the direction of the BOD. To attract and maintain a quality AOG staff the BOD must educate the AOG membership about appropriate salary levels. Care must be taken to avoid any appearance that staff selection is aimed at carrying out an “agenda.” Such conduct would invite a serious AOG setback.**

Goal #9: Ensure the AOG Board complies with the Bylaws adopted on May 4, 2006.

**CAS Assessment: Adhering to the bylaws that were approved by the membership provides a framework for members on what to expect from the AOG.**

**CAS Recommendation: In light of previous tumult, any action the BOD can take to show it is an orderly, organized entity will help reassure AOG members that the ship is righting itself.**

Submitted by the AOG Class Advisory Senate, October 2007