

“Move Faster!” the commander screamed, as I stepped off the bus at the United States Military Academy (West Point) on reception day. I sprinted to each checkpoint across campus with my large duffle bag containing my issued gear. Though my arms burned with soreness this was a better alternative than letting the bags touch the ground and causing our entire platoon to do push-ups. From the moment I arrived at West Point, it was clear my college education would be unlike that of other academic institutions.

My willingness to face these challenges and desire to serve stems back to my childhood, observing my first-generation immigrant mother’s unrelenting work ethic. Despite the social and structural challenges she faced as a woman from a minority community in Malaysia, she resolved to succeed by excelling academically, ultimately gaining acceptance to, and attending Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Over the years, she often reminded my twin sister and I of the opportunities we have in the US, in a country with people of so many different cultures. I resolved to pursue an academic career at a rigorous institution such as my mother had done, but also recognized that I wanted to serve the country that had done so much for my family — this led me to apply to West Point.

My intrinsic appreciation of diversity that was ingrained in me from my upbringing took new meaning upon arriving at West Point. When I entered the institution in 2020, my class included 13 combat veterans and 12 foreign nationals from a variety of partner nations, with 15% of the class being first-generation college students, nearly 40% from minority communities, and at least one student representing almost every state and territory in the United States. Rather than simply appreciating the importance of diversity, I had the opportunity to witness it first-hand. Whether working with my astoundingly bright physics partner who would return to serve the Albanian military after graduation, competing with my Korean-born and raised League of Legends Captain on the eSports team, or conducting Computer Science research with my Chinese-American peer from Washington State, I have consistently been exposed to the overwhelming benefits of working with individuals of different socioeconomic, cultural, and academic backgrounds.

My role as a company commander during cadet summer training presented me with a unique opportunity to tangibly translate my appreciation of diversity into building an effective team. Cadet summer training details at West Point are mandatory training events which present under-class-cadets the opportunity to complete their commissioning requirements while affording upper-class-cadets the unique opportunity of leading their peers in a complex military environment. Trainees during these summer details have incredibly packed schedules including days of marksmanship, calling for artillery fire, and land navigation, all of which culminates in engaging an enemy force in a simulated combat environment for multiple days. As a commander, I was not only responsible for the successful training of over 100 under-class cadets, but also for the leadership development of over 25 of my upper-class peers.

Every member of my cadre offered a unique set of skills, which were invaluable in creating an effective training environment that ensured trainees would pass the various military skills assessments necessary to commission into the Army. I would frequently be given major tasks with tight notice, whether that entailed maintaining full accountability of \$200,000 of night-vision equipment that needed to be distributed to every trainee and cadre member within only two hours or moving the entire company to an entirely new location a half-mile away minutes before darkness fell. It was in times like these that I needed to rely on the diverse skillset

the rest of my peers had to offer. My executive officer, an eloquent, hard-working, and tech savvy African American woman from Georgia, assembled an excel sheet in mere minutes which contained every cadet's name, accounted for the night-vision goggles three serial numbers, and was able to efficiently process all 125 cadets in just over an hour. One of my platoon leaders, a tough, Christian, white man from South-Texas, could orient himself and navigate through the woods in pitch-black with only a map, quickly allowing us to right our location as the sun set. While the responsibility for both these tasks fell on me as a commander, it was immediately clear that members of our team had unique yet impressive solutions to challenging problems, and it was my duty to channel these diverse experiences to ensure the success of our whole team.

My time as a company commander indicated fundamentally that teams require diversity of thought to succeed. Our organization excelled during these challenging situations because we had individuals who were able to fully utilize and offer their skills. I recognize now that creating environments where individuals not only feel comfortable with, but actively want to offer their own perspectives is critical to creating an effective team. Receiving the honor of "Best Company Commander" for my leadership throughout the detail cemented in my mind that this manner of leadership is respected and valued throughout the Army. I will continue to lead groups with this internalized appreciation for diverse thought.

As I apply to Carnegie Mellon's Institute of Technology & Strategy, I am excited by the prospect of joining another diverse community of individuals with a shared passion for developing novel technologies, dedicated to service to the world and nation. As an undergraduate researcher at West Point, I have learned to build software for military applications; these applications introduce unique constraints making the need for novel solutions even more pressing. My service obligation as a Cyber Officer in the United States Army upon graduation differentiates me from the path of my peers, and I believe it is precisely that diversity of experience that I bring to the table that would spur creative solutions to existing problems. I am convinced that the diverse and cohesive teams within Carnegie Mellon's programs distinguishes it from other academic institutions, and I would be privileged to continue my education in this prestigious program.