

As I carefully climbed down the seemingly endless flights of stairs in Arvin Gymnasium, wiping the dried blood off my upper lip and cheek, I knew it was going to be a long day. I was pleased that I had performed well in my mid-semester graded fight in my mandatory boxing class, but it was only 9 A.M., and I had a full day of classes ahead of me. This is a typical schedule at the United States Military Academy (West Point), and challenging days such as this have occurred routinely during my time here.

West Point's focus is to produce effective US Army leaders and officers. While it also maintains a high level of academic rigor, the additional requirements make it impossible to focus exclusively on academic work. Apart from our typical academic requirements for our selected undergraduate degrees, we must take multiple military science and physical fitness courses. Additionally, we regularly have mandatory formal meals, weekly briefings, and weekend training, all while holding military duty positions throughout the semester. As a junior, I frequently returned to my room exhausted after my submission grappling class, ready to start working on my computer science homework, only to realize I had military leadership coursework to complete first. In addition to my dense academic schedule that semester, I was also directly responsible for the daily well-being, performance, and grading of 6 underclass students. It isn't unusual for me to study well into the night, simply to fit in all the required activities.

While I believe I have thrived and excelled at West Point, I realize that the rigorous academic and physical requirements have made it challenging for me (and other cadets) to pursue summer research and internships in technical spaces. Cadets and instructors are required to participate in field training for at least six to eight weeks each year. These trainings are incredibly formative but make research throughout the summer nearly impossible as students and instructors will likely be in the field. Additionally, West Point cadets can only engage in West Point-endorsed programs, assuming our tight schedules permit. The summers are deeply enriching militarily and physically, yet inhibit cadets' ability to pursue further academic work like other undergraduate students.

Regardless, I believe that the time management, leadership, and military skills I have cultivated throughout the cadet experience at West Point more than make up for my inability to focus purely on academic pursuits. I have learned how to lead large groups of peers under duress in a combat environment. I have learned how to manage my time with various competing obligations. I have learned how to maintain my physical fitness despite seemingly having no free time in my schedule. All of these skills have made me a more well-rounded individual, and ultimately, I believe they will allow me to succeed in Carnegie Mellon's challenging master of information technology strategy program.