



GUSBILIRAKIS
Representing the 12th District Florida

TIPS FOR SERVICE ACADEMY APPLICANTS

START EARLY! Spring of the candidate's junior year of high school is the best time to start the process, as it is both time-consuming and paperwork intensive. Unlike a normal university, in addition to the application packet there is *at least* one nomination packet, a complete physical (scheduled through the Academy), and a candidate fitness assessment. All of this paperwork takes time and patience. Please start early.

Research both your intended academy and the service with which that academy is affiliated: Unlike a normal university, upon graduation from a service academy, the Cadet/Midshipman not only graduates with a degree, but also with a commission as an Officer in the Armed Forces of America. When the candidate is considering an academy, it is important not only to think about the four years of study, but also about the five-year (minimum) commitment to serve in the armed forces—including possible service in combat and all that that implies. *For many candidates, this nine-year period is the equivalent of half of their current lifetime.* This is not something that should be entered into lightly, and understanding true commitment is key to a successful application.

Attend a Summer Seminar Program: The academies offer a weeklong program between the candidate's junior and senior high school year that shows a candidate what to expect the following summer. This provides a great way to determine if an academy is the right choice! More information about this program is available from academy liaisons. If the candidate has the chance to participate in the program, it is time well spent.

USNA offers Summer Program and STEM Program during the summer. Two separate programs. Apply to both! USAFA Summer Seminar includes space-related experiences and summer research programs. USMA refers to their program as Summer Leaders Experience (SLE) and has a Priority Review Deadline and then follows a rollout decision making process. Most of the Academies announce dates around December and January with deadlines to apply in or about February and April. If you open a portal with the academies by the beginning/fall semester of your junior year you should receive notice about the Summer Programs. We advise you to also monitor their websites for publication of the information.

The USCGA offers The Academy Introduction Mission (AIM). Though the USMMA does not offer a summer program, they have a graduate program for individuals with completed degrees who want advanced knowledge in special topics but don't want to fully commit to the 36-credit Master of Science in Marine Engineering (MmarE).

The summer programs are NOT in any way a prerequisite for admissions to the Academy. It is also NOT a prescreening or preselection program. However, it's worth participating so you can learn firsthand cadet living, explore academic facilities and research labs, and participate in a variety of workshops that can help grow and shape you into a competitive applicant! Most of the academies offer assistance with your application during the program.

Buy a three-ring binder with several tabs: Although it is only necessary to receive one nomination, all candidates may apply, and in fact are encouraged to apply through all four methods – his or her own US Representative, his or her two US Senators, and the Vice President. In addition, some students are eligible for service-related nominations. While most applications for nominations are similar, all are unique. When combined with the application material for each academy, plus the medical and candidate fitness assessment forms, it is very easy to misplace critical information, or think that the applicant has submitted material when he or she hasn't. Having an organized system to keep track of your submitted material is essential. Don't forget to keep a copy of each submitted item in case the original is lost in the mail.

Ask questions: For many, this is the hardest piece of advice to follow. The candidate is used to succeeding and finding the answers on his or her own. Asking questions does not suggest ignorance; it reveals commitment and seriousness to the process. Many avenues exist for the candidate to explore: a guidance counselor or another teacher/coach who is familiar with the military, the Admissions' Officer at the Academy, a Congressional liaison, an Academy liaison officer (MALO or Blue and Gold officer) and even friends or relatives who have military/academy experience.

Proofread your application completely/Complete the application in a timely manner: An application that is complete, neat, and submitted ahead of schedule signals to the Academy and to the Nominating Authority that the applicant takes the process seriously. On the flip side, a sloppy application reflects *very* poorly on the applicant. Grammar counts! Typos hurt!

When asking someone to write you a letter of recommendation, choose carefully: Each candidate who applies for a nomination from Congressman Bilirakis is asked to submit three letters of recommendation. A poorly written letter of recommendation does not reflect poorly on the applicant, but it does show a lack of effort on the applicant's part to present the best package possible. Likewise, a short, general letter of recommendation, or one from someone who does not know you well, also shows a lack of effort. Take the time to choose a reference who knows you well and who can fully articulate your strengths – and candidly point out any weaknesses. Give your references a copy of your extracurricular activities or sit down with them and make sure that they know how you spend your time outside of class. The applicant is encouraged (though not required) to have at least one teacher and one coach write a letter – since in many cases, these people are best able to get a complete picture of your character. The title of the reference is not important -what is important is how well the reference knows the applicant.

Brag! The applicants who apply to a service academy are high achievers. Each applicant needs to set him/herself apart from the other applicants. Fill out the packet completely and if an activity is not listed, or if you are mentioned in the newspaper or in a publication, add that to your materials. The applicant's packet of information needs to present the candidate in the best possible light. If the information is not in the application, those who are evaluating the candidate have no way of knowing about a special award, a citation, or a particular skill. Tell us.

**Again, START EARLY and
DON'T BE AFRAID TO ASK QUESTIONS!**