

Eastern MA USAFA Families Club

GRADUATION TIPS

MOST IMPORTANT PAGE – Parent grad week information link:

<https://www.usafa.edu/about/traditions/graduation/>

Graduation is coming soon for the USAFA Class of 2018. Best wishes from your Eastern MA USAFA Families Club! We have tried to put together some helpful hints for you. Remember that this not a graduation from your Parent's Club! You have a lifetime membership and a duty to give back to those who come after you. Please keep involved and stay in touch. Please send your graduation hints so that we can keep up to date and help those who follow.

Detailed Information: The following points are based on 100 pages of suggestion for graduation. Do not feel compelled to do everything on the list. Pick and choose whatever fits you, your family/friends, and your cadet. Again, everything is subject to change from year to year.

THE OVERRIDING SUGGESTIONS WERE:

1. BE EARLY!

Cannot be stressed enough! Early means 1-2 hours before the event to insure you arrive on time, traffic on I-25 plus the 100s of cars all trying to get to the same place at the same time can cause delays. Everyone must pass through security and often times parking will be a good distance away from the venue. Take advantage of shuttles. *Bringing snacks and water in the car for waiting times (before or after) is a great idea. Only factory sealed water bottles will be allowed in the parade field and stadium for the Graduation Parade and Graduation.*

2. HELP YOUR CADET MOVE OUT

Make sure that your cadet is packed and ready to sign out right after graduation. Cadets can't start too soon on this. Some people had cadets bring some stuff to the hotel every night.

3. DRESS CODE

You will be sent information on the appropriate dress for the different Grad Week events or you can find them listed on the USAFA Graduation website. Dress comfortably and appropriately. Plan on bringing layers of clothing and plan for cold, hot, and rain as temperatures in Colorado Springs can and do fluctuate drastically from day to day and even hour to hour. Casual clothes (polo shirts/slacks) are okay for most things. A nice dress/suit for the Baccalaureate and Superintendent's Reception and your best dress/suit for the Graduation Banquet, Ball, Commissioning Ceremonies, and Graduation Reception are strongly recommended. Good, broken-in walking shoes, hats with brims, and sunscreen are a must.

4. SCHEDULE/AGENDA/BOOKLET

Give family/friends a schedule/agenda and tell them to do what they want to do, be there early, and that they are responsible for getting themselves to each event. Remind them that the Grad days are ALL and ONLY about the cadet.

Provide an agenda/packet of info/letter to include dress codes for each event, the significance behind some of the events, and seating arrangements for the group. Also include a note from the USAFA website asking for your cooperation in “insuring your guests wear appropriate attire” while at the Academy. Send this to your guests ahead of time so they can plan accordingly.

Things to include in your info packet:

- Maps of Colorado Springs, Academy Grounds, Cadet Area, Stadium
- Directions to venues with phone numbers
- Phone numbers of everyone in your party
- Link to USAFA graduation website/schedule and brochure

5. PHOTOS, PHOTOS, PHOTOS

Take lots of pictures of your cadet, with his/her friends, with family, of the Academy, the big screen at the stadium, you get the picture (pun intended). The Graduation Parade is ideal for picture taking. Be sure to get a picture of them at this time in their parade uniform (after Graduation the white hat will be gone). BEFORE the graduation parade, or on the day of the Award Ceremonies, get a picture of your cadet by the class crest. The class crest will be taken down immediately following the ceremony and the Class of 2019's will go up!

6. “SITTING WITH YOUR CADET’S SQUADRON CAN GET UGLY”

You will be sitting with the families of your Cadet's squadron in specified locations during the graduation ceremony. Many people have experienced rude behavior from a few who screamed and yelled when their cadet's names were announced, barring others from hearing their cadets' names and making the “graduation” photoshoot one of an unknown person's hands, buttocks, and posters blocking the view of the stage and any video recording is just one long horn-blast or scream. (PRO TIP: Buy the graduation DVD – pre-orders will be made available well in advance of graduation.)

Think about moving over/up or down a few rows or sections just before your graduate's squadron receives their diplomas so you can take your picture and hear their name and move back. Or perhaps ask another family/group if they'd be willing to switch seats with you for these reasons. Remember to be courteous yourself and if traveling with young children to make sure that they also behave.

7. LIMITED MOBILITY/HANDICAP ADVICE

Reoccurring theme: Assign someone to take care of this person. Some people have hired an attendant from their parent's nursing home to caretake during the week – and the person loved being included and getting a chance to travel. Others have assigned a specific family member to do the job. You can also hire a local person through Comfort Keepers to tend to them during graduation. Things to remember:

- Move slowly because of thinner oxygen levels
- Consider renting an oxygen tank (info available on graduation website)
- Have your cadet get a handicapped USAFA parking permit
- Bring your person's state-issued Handicap parking pass (even bring the license plate if you can't find the pass!)
- Plan for bathroom breaks and ARRIVE EARLY!
- Handicap shuttles are available on all days except Graduation. There will be golf carts to shuttle handicapped guest and there should be a drop-off near the stadium that morning.

For Graduation: Handicapped seating is at the top of the “L” sections of the stadium and is limited. You can’t get onto the “L” section unless your ticket says so! 1/3 of the tickets will be on “L” for lower, another 1/3 “M” for middle, and the remaining “U” for upper. The sections are pre-assigned by squadron.

8. NEWS RELEASE

To be sent to your area newspapers to run AFTER you return. (This is optional, check with your cadet to see if s/he actually want you to do this.) Include a photo and a self-addressed stamped envelope for the return of photo (and hope you get it back). Info to include about your cadet:

- Cadet’s Full Name
- Cadet’s Major and Minors
- Cadet’s Base Assignment and Future Plans
- Cadet’s Ranks (such as Squadron Commander...)
- Cadet’s Honors
- Cadet’s Extra-curricular Activities
- Cadet’s Special Recognition
- Cadet’s Special Moments
- Cadet’s Squadron Name, parents’ names (and maybe grandparents’ names) and anything you’d like to add
- Note the date/place of graduation.

9. LOOSE-END SUGGESTIONS

- Check the USAFA Website daily for updates
- Decorate cars with large magnet boards and/or car paint (if driving and if this is okay with your cadet)
- Stock up on water and some essentials on arrival
- Consider a commissioning gift for people who will commission your cadet, as well as gifts for sponsor family, AOC, and any special cadet friends or roomies.

10. GIFT BAGS

Many people enjoy giving gift bags to family and friends traveling with them for graduation. A great idea is a goodie bag that they can bring to the graduation ceremony. Ideas for bag contents are things such as sunscreen, breakfast snacks, pom-poms, hand sanitizer, Chapstick, Kleenex, beads in your Cadet’s class color, squadron lapel pins, and water bottles. Please check the Graduation website for any restrictions on liquids or other items as well as bag policy.

11. REMEMBER TO BRING WITH YOU:

- Anything mailed from USAFA (e.g. tickets, passes, letters)
- Credit cards, AOG card, health cards, travel cards and MONEY!
- Driver’s licenses, ID cards, and/or Passports (NOTE: Some states’ licenses do not meet DOD regulations and those people will need a passport.)
- Prescription meds, headache remedies, etc. (in your carryon)
- Charger for cellphones, cameras, camcorders, laptops
- Memory cards for cameras/camcorders
- Some office supplies (scotch tape, scissors, glue, pens, etc.)
- Gifts, goodie bags, decorations

- Clothes! Toiletries and hats

12. PLANNING TIMELINE

12 Months Before

- Reserve hotel rooms/rentals homes (note cancellation policies in case of date changes, it happens!)
- The Base ITT office can always book discounted hotel rentals for the following hotels: Choice Hotels, Drury Inn, Fairfield Inn, and Best Western. Call 719-333-7367 to book. They can also assist with car rentals.

6-12 Months Before

- Determine the size of guest list
- Get a spiral notebook (or create an electronic file) to keep notes, musings, clippings, post-it notes, etc. in one place (Google Docs is great for sharing information)
- Checklist of to-do items, contacts, travel, schedule, maps & directions
- Housing contact info, suggestions, restaurants/banquets/catering, expenses
- Guest info and travel plans
- Keep a special place for all correspondence from USAFA
- Prepare "Save the Date" letters or magnets to mail to invitees
- Mark the dates on calendars and planners
- Make preliminary budget
- Make plane reservations
- Start planning reception/party
- Reserve hotel rooms/send deposits (if not done already)
- Reserve restaurant(s) for your group
- Draw up names and addresses for Graduation Announcements
- Begin compiling names and addresses of guests who are coming
- Start looking for Travel Deals
- Order anything special you might want for your cadet such as a flag flown over the Capital, the class painting, sabre, a/o gun, etc. Keep a list of what you have ordered, from whom and how to contact later, cost, and when to expect it.
- Begin looking for things to go into the goodie bags

4 Months Before

- Order announcements (get extras). The framed announcement with spot for a grad photo is very nice.
- Order pictures (REMEMBER ENOUGH FOR GRADUATION NOTICES) (get extras)
- Order Graduation DVD for yourself and anyone who may want them (grandparents)

2 Months Before

- Address invitations and announcements
- Finalize all details with hotel, reception hall, caterers
- Finalize travel details
- Order graduation cake (if needed)
- Arrange (or assist with) accommodations for out-of-town guests

- Send out tentative schedule, clothing suggestions (from USAFA graduation website)
- Arrange for wheelchair or babysitting (and oxygen tank rentals)
- Order t-shirts/caps/gifts/banners/photo buttons
- Order anything special or personalized (e.g. grad cigars)
- Think about any gifts for sponsors, AOC, Cadet's friends or roomies
- Order or collect anything for your gift bags for those attending

1 Week Before

- Draw up meal schedule and menu plan; grocery list
- Pack gift bags
- Send out final schedule and reminders
- Contact guests who have not responded
- Go over final details with all involved
- Pack suitcases
- CHECK OVER YOUR CHECK-LIST, TO DO ITEMS AND BRING THE LIST WITH YOU
- Prep news release to be sent to local newspaper upon your return
- Pack your bag of must-have items, such as car passes
- Pull together any cadet/party favors, decorations, graduation gifts, commissioning gifts, cameras/batteries/film or cards, office supplies, and duct tape.
- Make extra copies of passes, airline tickets, agendas, phone number lists, etc.

EVENTS

Superintendent's Reception: Must be escorted by your cadet. Bring your own camera to the Carlton House for photos. Read the bios on the top brass people from the USAFA website as they will be there to meet and greet.

Award Ceremonies: If your cadet is receiving any awards, there will be an award ceremony(ies) to attend. Dress is business casual and there are receptions following the event(s). The Award Ceremonies take place the day before the Graduation Parade and it is a great time to get photos of your cadet in uniform around the campus.

Parade Practice: Completely optional; usually day before parade. It will allow you to know where to sit the next day and do a dry run of where the Commissioning ceremony will be so that you will know the way and make sure directions are correct.

Graduation Parade: Bring a small towel to wipe down bleachers that may be wet, or bring something to sit on in the grass. Look for the little white flags on the Parade Field which will mark where the squadron Firsties are to stand when they break away from the Cadet Wing in their last parade. Sit in the section about 6-8 rows up so you can have a good look at the Parade and better photos of your cadet.

Plan to arrange to meet your cadet after any ceremony, either assign a meeting place or have your cadet come to you! Your mass of look-alike T-shirts, hats, or neon poster boards can be the sighting point for you cadet.

Commissioning: *This is the one event where you only need show up about 30 minutes prior to the ceremony but verify this with your cadet.*

USAFA Commissioning Ceremony Sequence of Events (Note: Squadrons will use this as a guide when organizing commissioning ceremonies. The ceremony usually takes approximately 60-90 minutes with a 30 minute reception following.)

- Narrator opens ceremony with a welcome to the families and friends and a brief history of the commissioning ceremony and introduces distinguished visitors
- National Anthem
- Invocation (optional)
- AOC makes comments to graduates and families
- If a guest speaker is invited, he/she makes remarks
- Fifty-year Legacy Class Representative makes remarks
- Narrator calls graduates up on stage in alphabetical order, one at a time, accompanied by their commissioning officer
- Once oath is administered, the narrator invites whoever the cadet has chosen to pin on their new rank to join them on stage
- As the cadet leaves the stage, the Legacy Class Representative presents the graduate with a gift. This continues until all cadets have been administered the oath.
- Toasts and light refreshments are offered.
- Cadets are reminded to remove 2nd Lt rank until after graduation ceremony

Graduation

- Night before: Send out live link to any family or friends who are not in attendance and want to watch. Ask someone to record it (if you didn't already order the DVD).
- Pack a tailgate dinner or snacks to enjoy while waiting for Graduation traffic to clear. Use your cellphone to contact others in your group on where to park so you'll be in the same vicinity.
- If possible, send someone ahead to the stadium to secure assigned seats as some people will ignore the ticket assignments.
- Rent the stadium seats (\$5 each)
- If you have to leave immediately after Graduation, park as far away from the stadium as you will be allowed, the north side is best. NOTE: No one can leave before the Thunderbirds performance has concluded. Usually about 1:30 pm.
- Allow your cadet time away from family to say good-bye to good friends.

****Bring or purchase extra water bottles at the venue to give to your graduate after the ceremony. They will not have any water provided to them during the ceremony and they are parched!!!***

***The most important thing to remember is to enjoy this once in a lifetime event in your child's life and savor each moment. Coordinate each activity with your graduate and follow their lead and respect their wishes. After all, this is all about them.
Congratulations 2018!***