

Leaders in Uniform

ROTC cadets step up to the challenge

By Lisa Sheaffer

What do Colin Powell, Sam Walton, and Earl Graves have in common? The Secretary of State, the late Wal-Mart founder, and *Black Enterprise* magazine publisher all share a past connection to the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC). So, just like these individuals led the way in their respective fields, are the leaders of the next generation marching off to boot camp? Well, not exactly, but many are enrolling in the ROTC program.

The core values for the ROTC program at **Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University** are integrity, service, and excellence, but their aptitude for leadership can't be ignored. At a minimum, senior cadets are required to hold a leadership position on campus for at least one semester. Furthermore, they often become the guides and teachers for the younger cadets because of the disproportionate number of officers for the more than 500 cadets.

"We organize the students to mirror a real Air Force wing," says Major John Heidmann, Air Force ROTC cadet commander. "They have a responsibility to make things happen and find a way to mobilize each other."

Cadets can hone their leadership skills during leader labs. Senior cadets teach basic skills such as marching, physical training, and group problem-solving. "Leadership building is important so that we can be the leaders we need to be for the country," Heidmann says.

ROTC students at **Bethune-Cookman College** wear leadership excellence patches on their sleeves, which is their unit's motto. "The world is constantly crying out for leaders in every aspect of society," says Capt. Craig L. Robinson, assistant professor of military science at ERAU and B-CC. "The impact of leadership or lack thereof is felt either positively or negatively in every way."

Leading by Example

Christopher Zotter, Army ROTC cadet and ERAU senior, became part of the ROTC program after he won a four-year Green-to-Gold Scholarship, given to enlisted soldiers with the aspirations and the ability to become officers.

Zotter undertook the responsibility of coordinating and implementing the training of younger cadets, and he doesn't take this responsibility lightly because he says if these

exercises aren't run well, the cadets miss out on the best possible training.

Cadets also are the key components to the command staff which develops the training plans for the Ranger Challenge Team, a group that competes head to head with other schools in physical fitness, rifle marksmanship, land navigation, and basic infantry tactics. ERAU continually ranks within the top three of 26 schools in Georgia, Florida, and Puerto Rico.

Zotter and the other leaders that marched this team to success operate under the Army's concept of "be, know, and do." "The leadership skills one has are very important," Zotter says. "You have to be the leader your

program in college. However, the program has developed her skills, especially her leadership skills, even more than she imagined. "I never imagined that someday I would be the cadet wing commander in charge of the training of over 600 cadets," Bouffard says. "It was hard to believe, even after I had finished the job, that I had done it. ROTC prepared me to take on that challenge and make the right decisions."

Bouffard realizes that becoming a leader is something that cadets need to work toward. "One thing I've noticed is that you can be a good person, a good cadet, and a good student but not a good leader," Bouffard says. "In order to have the Air Force be productive, its leaders should be the kind that people want to follow. I think it's extremely important that we focus on teaching leadership skills to the cadets because we want to help make them the best officers they can be."

The ROTC program is set up so that students really focus on leadership building.



COURTESY ERAU

ERAU's Ranger Challenge Team members (from left) Jeffrey O'Dell, Jason Carter, Michael Ariano, and Dallas Austin tote their boat to the finish line at the Sandhurst International Military Competition.

subordinates are entitled to, you have to know everything that is required of your position, and you must do what you are asking everyone else to do."

However, Zotter sees the importance of his leadership skills beyond the call of duty. Leadership skills translate into better performance whether you're in the military or civil sector. "In the civilian field, if you think your boss is the best at what he does, you'll be inspired to work for him and do your best to be as good or better," Zotter says. "The military is much the same—the best leaders are the ones constantly improving and expanding their abilities."

Taking Charge

Candice M. Bouffard, AFROTC student at ERAU, dreams of someday becoming an astronaut. She decided during high school that the best way for her dream to take flight was by enrolling in the ROTC

Freshmen are indoctrinated into the program and they are expected to learn the basics of the ROTC program. Meanwhile, sophomores are exposed to leadership building and are taught how to lead the freshmen. As juniors and seniors, cadets are assigned to various leadership positions. They are given the opportunity to hold different positions, which allows them to learn their leadership style.

As a result of this leadership-building environment, Bouffard has gained the confidence she needs to take on challenging positions. "The reason ROTC enhances leadership skills is because it provides various opportunities and experiences to test your leadership abilities," Bouffard says. "I know that now I feel like I can tackle things that I would not have tackled before."

For John Heidmann, contact Capt. Andrew Blair at andrew.blair@erau.edu, Zotter at zotter@erau.edu, and Bouffard at eaglewingpres@hotmail.com.

See the complete story and additional cadets at www.floridaleader.com