



Editor's Note: This post is part of the FTGN Army Broadening Series that we are running from March 15-30, 2021. Each day, we will publish new insights into the Army's various broadening assignments, starting March 15th, 2021 with an [overview of AIM 2.0](#) and a discussion on how to educate others on assignment selection criteria.

By Josh Bowen and David Weart

Not to start off overly dramatic, but we are confident in saying that being Tactical Officers (TAC) at the United States Military Academy at West Point, NY has made us better officers, leaders, spouses, parents, and people.

This experience is a key highlight of our 10+ year careers and equipped us to lead and develop others better both here at West Point and beyond as we re-join our operational formations.

But it is a unique experience, for sure, so we want to offer a summary of what this job is,

why it's absolutely something you should consider doing, and why it is worth your time.

What is It?

A four-year tour at West Point (typically three for NCOs) where you spend the first year earning a Master of Arts degree as a full-time student and then three years as faculty at West Point in the TAC role. TACs are West Point's "tip of the spear" in its mission to graduate 1,000 Cadets to be commissioned Army officers and leaders of character. TACs ensure Cadets graduate as the best versions of themselves possible - and to be the best officers they can be for the Soldiers who deserve outstanding leadership.

For officers, the degree program is known as the Eisenhower Leadership Development Program (ELDP), where graduates earn a MA in social-organizational psychology from Teachers College, Columbia University (in NYC). Three-quarters of the degree program is instructed by Teachers College professors at NYC, while the remaining quarter is from senior faculty from West Point's Department of Behavioral Science & Leadership (BS&L); those classes are taken at West Point. The degree program offers education in organizational psychology and change, group dynamics, executive coaching, and a large variety of supporting subjects; bottom line: you're learning the science of leading and developing organizations. After the one-year degree program, graduates serve out a three-year additional service obligation (ADSO) as a TAC at West Point.

For NCOs, the tour is typically three years in the TAC NCO role. This includes a three-week leadership certificate program offered by Teachers College, Columbia University; this typically occurs in February of your first year in the job. The certificate program is a condensed version of the officers' ELDP, covering the same topics and taught by the same Columbia and West Point faculty. The program is known as the Benavidez Leadership Development Program (BLDP) and is a transformational experience that equips NCOs with the same frameworks and leader development tools as their officer counterparts.

Defining the TAC Role

So, if I'm spending three years as a TAC, what does that mean?

TACs are officially the legal command team for one of the 36 West Point Cadet companies. However, you do not act as a typical command team because the Cadet company creates their own chain of command from Cadet commander and First Sergeant (1SG) down to platoons, squads, teams, and freshman serving as Cadet Privates (or members of squad).

Thus, company TAC teams (one officer and NCO) primarily teach, advise, and coach the Cadets as they learn to lead and develop the company themselves. The Cadet company is the critical "leadership laboratory" for Cadets to experiment and learn through experience within an Army chain of command.

Overall, we would break down the TAC job into a few key roles:

- **Teach, Advise, & Coach:** Be a teacher, advisor, and coach to Cadets and the chain of command; don't *be* the commander or 1SG.
- **Cadets' Primary Leader Developer:** TACs facilitate Cadets' learning and development across their experiences in the four pillars of Cadet development (academics, military, physical, and character) to have them graduate as ready as possible to be exceptional Lieutenants and officers.
- **Standards & Discipline:** Cadets don't know what they don't know and having them lead one another can sometimes feel like *Lord of the Flies*. TACs are the beacons for military standards & discipline - both in enforcing them as well as educating Cadets on why things like professional military bearing, attention to detail, and Army customs and courtesies matter. Our most enduring mindset as TACs, especially in this space, is: "At what point do I intervene?"

- **Company Systems:** Like an Army company or battalion, the Cadets will create unit systems and staff functions to ensure they are managing operations to be effective and efficient. Due to their limited experience and context, Cadets often need teaching, advising, and coaching to ensure they are establishing functional systems to meet the day-to-day demands of the unit (taskings, administrative document flow, training, etc.).
- **Build the Team:** Be a good steward of the Army. Be the example to Cadets of an officer or NCO and leader they want to emulate. Have a strong presence, inspire, and bring energy to the team. Ultimately, enable the Cadets **through** the chain of command.
- **Inspire Life-Long Commitment & Learning:** Create life-long learners equipped and inspired to learn now **and** still after they graduate.

Sell It to Me - Why Become a TAC?

Short answer - this has been the most transformative experience of our careers. But, to expand on that for some added context, here are a few reasons why:

- **Top-Tier Education:** You receive a world-class education from an Ivy League institution on the science of organizational leadership and development. A majority of that education for both officers and NCOs occurs in New York City, which offers an unparalleled amount of diversity in experience and exposure to people.
- **Your Job is Leader Development:** Your duty description is to improve an organization and to ensure approximately 30 Cadets graduate each year from your company as ready as they can. If you're passionate about developing leaders, we see no job that lets you focus on that like being a TAC.
- **You're at the World's Preeminent Leader Development Institution:**

Opportunities abound at West Point that you will not receive anywhere else. Over three years, we've had the chance to listen to lectures from countless general officers and CSMs; we've participated in events like MWI's War Studies Conference; and we've had the fortune to listen to and interact with internationally renowned leaders and authors to include names like Indra Nooyi (former PepsiCo CEO), Jim Collins, Simon Sinek, Brené Brown, Jean Twenge, Daniel Coyle, Jocko Willink, August Cole, and more.

- **Family-Friendly Community:** West Point is a small post with a very predictable annual schedule. While it is not a typical 9-to-5 job at all, it's a great chance for you and your family to have a predictable few years where you are able to come home around 355 of 365 nights a year. You're not deploying, you're not going to NTC/JRTC, or going to the field (outside a few weeks during Cadet Summer Training). Being West Point faculty is a family-immersive experience in the best way.

Who We Need

Officers begin ELPD and become a TAC after completing company command or your branch-equivalent key development positions. From here, you will transition to or complete ILE at the end of your tour. For NCOs, this is a post-platoon sergeant opportunity, where most are selected for Master Sergeant while assigned and transition to the Master Leaders Course and then 1SG after.

This is a nominative opportunity and that is because we need the right people for this critically important, but incredibly challenging role. We highly value diversity of TACs, in social demographics, in branches and MOS, and in commissioning sources. But, regardless of those metrics, we need leaders who are:

- **Passionate and Committed Leader Developers:** While West Point creates robust

developmental systems for Cadets, it's your job to ensure each Cadet is growing based on their unique developmental needs. TACs have to fill challenging, uncomfortable spaces as Cadets learn, grow, and experience more as young adults. We need leaders who care about Cadets and future officers and are willing to pour into them through the thick and thin.

- **Teachers, Mentors, & Coaches:** Every experience, challenge, and failure should be a learning experience for Cadets; it is all part of their 47-month development as a West Point Cadet. TACs need to be able to guide Cadets through their experiences to help them learn from it.
- **Live & Enforce High Standards:** TACs are the primary examples for Cadets as Army officers and NCOs. We must be able and willing to role-model that example, enforce standards, and inspire Cadets to both live up to those standards and ultimately own and enforce those standards on one another.
- **Developmental experience for future Field Grade positions and organizational level leadership:** Effective TACs recognize they are transitioning from direct and organizational level leaders. Employing traditional direct level leadership techniques to solve every problem in their companies detracts from the Cadet's development and agency. TACs, similar to BN/SQDN S3s and XOs, manage systems and processes while building a cohesive team. I (David) firmly believe the TAC officer role is one of the best preparatory positions for field grade key development role.

But There's a "But," Right?

I (Josh) called my old TAC from my time as a Cadet once I found out I was accepted to this job. His first description of the job during that call was: "that was the best and most frustrating job of my career." After three years of doing this ourselves, we can absolutely agree.

Though this has been a transformative experience for us, it has not been all “sunshine and roses.” A few challenges that you can expect as a TAC to offer accurate expectation management:

- **TACs Go Where the Cadets Are:** Critical to being a TAC is leader presence with Cadets. But this often includes events during evenings or over weekends (military training, sports games, social events, etc.). Commonly referred to as “TAC coverage” here, there are many leader presence requirements that can easily make this a 6-day-a-week job more often than not.
- **You Have ONE NCO:** As company commanders, we were used to having 40-50 NCOs in our company to do all the things we need our NCOs to do that make us the exceptional Army that we are. You don’t have that in a Cadet company. While Cadet juniors and sophomores fill Cadet NCO roles, they don’t have the experience of hardened Army NCOs. Standards, accountability, and basic discipline can go awry if not closely monitored, hence our comments about *Lord of the Flies* and the emphasis on standards & discipline above.
- **“The West Point Way”:** You’re leading a unique population. These Cadets were nominated by members of Congress and their education comes at a cost to the American taxpayer. How we separate or retain, punish, and take action on Cadets is and must be different from standard Army processes. The best way we can describe it is that what used to be a tactical-level decision (separating a Soldier, etc.) is now a three-star-general-level decision. Many actions take considerable time, paperwork, and attention.
- **Be Clear on Your Timeline:** Primarily for officers, ensure you’re able and willing to commit four years. Most TACs attend satellite ILE (4-months in-person TDY during the summer followed by distance learning) or elect to defer resident ILE one to two years. Ensure you’re able to and ok with committing that length of time toward your overall career progression.

Learn More!

We need great leaders to be West Point TACs, and we would love to have you join the team! Interested in learning more? Below are links to West Point's official information about being a TAC to include application. But, if you would like to ask particular questions, feel free to reach out to me (Josh); you can email me at Joshua.bowen@westpoint.edu (good through May 2021) or Joshua.c.bowen1@gmail.com.

- West Point's [Brigade Tactical Department homepage](#).
- Officers: [Learn more about and apply to ELDP!](#)
- NCOs: [TAC NCO information](#) for interested NCOs.
- NCOs: Reference this [article about BLDP in the Army Magazine](#).

[Josh Bowen](#) is an engineer MAJ and finishing his 3rd year as a TAC officer. He was the TAC for company B2 for two years and is currently the 1st Regiment XO; he also teaches Military Leadership in support of BS&L and is a BLDP course director (Applied Leader Development). He is attending resident ILE next summer (deferred a year). Josh is passionate about making people and organizations better and enjoys doing that beyond his TAC role through his blog, [3x5 Leadership](#).

[David Weart](#) is the Squadron Operations Officer for the Regimental Engineer Squadron, Second Cavalry Regiment. He proudly served as the TAC Officer for Company G4 and as the action officer for the Benavidez Leader Development Program.

Share this:

- [Email](#)
- [Tweet](#)

- 
- [Print](#)
- [WhatsApp](#)