

# ASU ROTC programs prepare the next generation of service members

## ASU among top schools in the nation for future US armed services members

By Megan Neely, ASU News  
November 14, 2025

Hours before Arizona State University's Tempe campus buzzes with students trekking to their classes, one particular group starts their day training as part of their duties in the Reserve Officer Training Corps.

Cadets and midshipmen in the Army, Air Force and Naval ROTC programs gather early in the morning to practice what they have learned in that week's classes, from workouts to leadership exercises, all to work toward one collective goal: commissioning in the United States armed forces.

These cadets and midshipmen, who represent the U.S. Army, Air Force, Space Force, Marine Corps and Navy, are learning the necessary tools to become the next generation of leaders and continuing the historical legacy of programs that have contributed to setting national standards.

### Past to present day

Not long after former President Harry Truman established the United States Air Force in 1947, ASU (then known as the Arizona State College) became home to a new Reserve Officer Training Corps, a college-based program for students seeking a future in the U.S. Armed Forces.

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### WATCH: Learn more about ASU's ROTC programs

(Video: {<https://youtu.be/GyNA-y-avoQ?si=ssOcBgUr6-DKLpNA>})

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This year marks the 77th anniversary of the formation of both the Army and Air Force ROTC programs in 1948. The Naval ROTC program continues to climb the ranks both here at ASU and nationally, only 15 years after its establishment at the university.

ROTC units at ASU have changed since their founding to not only be more inclusive, but also to support more educational opportunities for students.

In its early years, women were involved in ASU ROTC through a coed group known as “The Kaydettes.” They were often dubbed as “the pride of the Corps of Cadets,” acting as hostesses for events. They served as a precision drill team in the Army ROTC unit, meeting every Tuesday morning and Thursday afternoon to prepare for the Phoenix drill meet, the largest in the Southwest. Today, women make up 20% of all officers who hold highly coveted positions in the armed forces.

In the 1950s, “Operation Bootstrap” was the name for the Air Force education program. At that time, over 150 Williams Air Force Base men were in attendance at the university, taking advantage of their educational benefits, with 22 graduating in 1957. Now, the ROTC units have expanded degree programs and scholarship offerings for those at any stage of service, graduating around 90 students annually.

Articles found in [ASU Library's University Archives](#) from years past mainly highlighted the Army and Air Force units' ability to throw great military balls and host social events. But today, the programs are making headlines as the best large Air Force ROTC detachment in the nation, one of the only Naval ROTC schools to serve as a nuclear service pipeline and an Army ROTC program repeatedly ranked in the top eight.

All three departments are among the best in the nation for providing students with the crucial training and skills needed to thrive in the U.S. military while maintaining a college experience, both academically and socially.

## **Sea Devils thriving in the desert**

In 2010, the [Naval ROTC](#) unit in the [Department of Naval Science](#) was founded at ASU with a class of 60 midshipmen. Fifteen years later, the Sea Devil Battalion has become one of the fastest growing ROTC units in the country, with close to 130 midshipmen in the program, and has established a reputation for producing some of the best officers in the fleet from communities in aviation to nuclear propulsion. The program boasts a 100% employment rate as officers upon graduation.

“It's really an honor to be here and be part of this program in its 15th year. I had the benefit of inheriting a program that was built from the ground up a very short time ago, but I still have people who were here from the inception of the program,” said [Capt. Kati Hill](#), professor of naval science and commanding officer of the Naval ROTC Battalion. Hill has been deployed to every geographic region where the U.S. Navy operates, including flying and leading combat operations during Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Lt. Andrew Coverston graduated from ASU and the Naval ROTC unit in 2020 with a degree in aerospace engineering with a concentration in aeronautics and minors in military leadership and media and film studies. He currently works at the university overseeing the nuclear programs and provides advice and guidance to students as they prepare for the fleet.

“I really enjoyed my time as a student and I leapt at the opportunity to return as ROTC staff. My college experience ended up being better than most of my peers, and almost all of that is due to

the opportunities and experiences from ASU and Arizona as a whole,” Coverston said.

Coverston views the Naval ROTC as the best path to commissioning because it provides Navy experience and training while also giving students more exposure to the fleet, as opposed to going straight into Officer Candidate School. He says this allows for more informed decisions when deciding what community to go into.

His favorite thing to share with his students is what it’s like to be a submariner.

“Due to the classified nature of the community and a lack of submariner staff, students tend to have little knowledge or desire to join the submarine community. I enjoy being able to share my experience of submarines with the students, especially when they change their mind from what they previously wanted,” Coverston says.

Naval ROTC educates and trains young men and women for service as commissioned officers in the Marine Corps or Navy, which celebrated its 250th anniversary on Oct. 13. In tandem with its anniversary, the battalion will graduate its 250th student since its founding this fall.

Despite its youth, ASU’s Naval ROTC is a part of the [Seaman to Admiral-21 program](#), made for highly qualified enlisted sailors with the opportunity to earn a commission as naval officers. Additionally, ASU is one of only 23 universities designated as a [Seaman to Admiral-21 Nuclear Option school](#), which offers a pipeline for enlisted sailors who hope to pursue a career in the nuclear field.

For the second year in a row, a student from the unit has been selected for the Explosive Ordnance Disposal Technician program — an elite bomb squad in the U.S. Navy performing tasks such as neutralizing various ordnance, including sea mines, torpedoes or depth charges.

The battalion has seen a 67% increase in participating students in the last four years and has provided 34 scholarships to students this year — the biggest class they’ve had in national scholarship winners. ASU’s Naval ROTC has also reintroduced its nursing program, with five students currently on a scholarship to become Naval nurses after they graduate.

“Education is so important to the career fields that our students are going into. I have no way of knowing what challenges these young leaders are going to face in the next five to 10 years,” Hill said. “We give them this foundation across academic subject matter and we teach them how to think because that’s what we’re going to need from them. The ability to be adaptable, flexible and really put their education to work in service.”

## Meet the Sun Devil Battalion

Created in the fall of 1948, in conjunction with the Air Force ROTC, the [Department of Military Science’s Army ROTC program](#) began taking shape. Today, it has made a national name for itself, receiving numerous prestigious honors throughout its history, and has become one of the leading commissioning sources for second lieutenants in the Army.

Since 1989, the program has been awarded the [General Douglas MacArthur Award](#) five times — an honor bestowed upon the top eight programs in the country. The Sun Devil Battalion also recently won the esteemed [Geronimo Award for Best Large Program in 2023](#) from the U.S. Army

Cadet Command 5th Brigade.

“The history of Army ROTC at ASU is very interesting. Ultimately, it goes back to the late 1800s when we started commissioning lieutenants in conjunction with the Arizona National Guard,” said Lt. Col. [Ryan Whipple](#), professor of military science. “Since that point, we've been constantly commissioning officers into the Army. We are currently one of the biggest and oldest ROTC programs in the country.”

Their efforts lead to the commission average of 50 second lieutenants in Army service in Active Duty, Reserve and National Guard components every year.

Hailey Heinrich is studying psychology in The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and is a senior in the Army ROTC program. Through her studies, she's been able to connect on a deeper level with ROTC.

“There are definitely some lines that get crossed between ROTC and psychology. Mostly the fact that I'm currently taking a psychology class in positive leadership, which is kind of hitting the nail right on the head. There's things I've learned in psychology, like empathy, especially when it comes to soldiers,” Heinrich said. “I'm so fascinated with the human brain and figuring out how it works. That's why I wanted to not only do ROTC, but also study the field of psychology.”

Heinrich currently serves as the Sun Devil Battalion's public relations officer, working as the representative of the unit to document its year through photos, videos and doing program outreach. She looks forward to the path the Army can provide her career-wise.

“I'm excited to graduate. I will be commissioned as a second lieutenant into the U.S. Army,” Heinrich said. “If I want to get my PhD or if I want to go to medical school, they have programs and steps that I can take that can help me get there.”

Whipple is passionate about serving his country and working directly with students. He believes ROTC programs are one of the best ways to develop officers for the U.S. Armed Forces.

“I'm excited when I see the success that our students have. They really come from a variety of backgrounds. They're able to approach problems, and they care about each other. One of the unique things about ASU Army ROTC is the ability for the students to support each other as they go through the ROTC program as well as the academic program,” Whipple said.

## **Taking cadet education sky high**

Alongside the Sun Devil Battalion, ASU's [Air Force ROTC unit](#) was also formed 77 years ago. Established as Detachment 025, the Flying Devils became a nationwide leader in preparing cadets for a successful career in the Air Force or Space Force.

“ASU is No. 1 in innovation, and our detachment here is focused on that as well. Whether it's out in the field or in the classroom, we're always looking for new ways to do things better and to increase our capabilities through smart thinking and smart use of resources,” said Lt. Col. [Gavin Hagens](#), professor of aerospace studies and commander of Detachment 025. “You really do see that every time you go out and watch this detachment in action.”

Presently, the detachment is the seventh largest in the nation, and student participation has grown over 60% in the last three years to include more than 300 Air Force cadets per year. This past year, the program had a 100% Rated selection rate, the process by which cadets are selected for flying careers as pilots, air battle managers, combat systems officers and remotely-piloted aircraft pilots.

The detachment has dubbed themselves as the Flying Devils, a designation that includes 11 schools throughout the Phoenix metro area whose students are cadets in the Air Force ROTC program.

Landry Howard is an Air Force ROTC cadet and is currently studying political science in the accelerated program through The College. She will begin her graduate degree in international affairs and leadership to connect to her military aspirations and career goals.

"I am deeply passionate about freedom and ensuring freedom in protecting our democracy. So those are things that we get to learn about in political science classes, and it definitely correlates to military service because our primary job is to protect the American people and make sure that we're upholding the Constitution," Howard said.

Her schedule every week includes physical training, aerospace classes and participating in the unit's leadership lab on Thursday mornings. Howard credits Air Force ROTC for providing her with various opportunities throughout college, including learning how to be a better leader.

After graduation, she will begin undergraduate pilot training for the U.S. Air Force, where she hopes to begin a long career of influencing people through leadership and inspiring others to serve.

"I keep continuing to pursue my passion for leadership and service because of the people that I've met along the way," said Howard. "The relationships that you can build through military service and leadership are truly once in a lifetime."

Detachment 025 has been nationally recognized, earning the prestigious [Right of Line Award](#) in 2024, which honors the best large detachment out of 145 Air Force ROTC detachments across the United States. In 2022, the U.S. Space Force began a [partnership with ASU](#) for an expansion of space initiatives and capabilities, including providing internship and mentorship opportunities for cadets.

"We have a path to success through ROTC. It starts here at the detachment where you learn leadership skills, how to be a good officer and how to incorporate excellence into your daily life," Hagens said. "When you graduate from ASU through this detachment, you are walking into a full-blown career. You can take that career and go all the way in the Air Force, or you can finish your service commitment and use the skills you've learned to pursue another field. But whichever you choose, you get a strong foundation and a great start through ROTC."

*This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).*

**Main image**





Arizona State University has a rich history of the Reserve Officers' Training Corps documented inside the University Archives. Photo by Meghan Finnerty, courtesy of University Archives

**Text image(s)**



Hailey Heinrich, an Army cadet and senior studying psychology in The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. Photo by Meghan Finnerty/ASU





Political science student Landry Howard. Photo by Meghan Finnerty/ASU

## Gallery



# APPLICATION AND AGREEMENT FOR ESTABLISHMENT OF ARMY RESERVE OFFICERS' TRAINING CORPS UNIT

DA 202 145-5  
Budget Bureau Number 29-2347  
Approval Expires 30 June 1954  
1954

SUBJECT: Application for the Establishment of Army Reserve Officers' Training Corps Unit

THRU : (1) Commanding General, 6 Army, PSF  
(2) Chief, Army Field Forces, Fort Monroe, Virginia

TO : The Adjutant General, Washington 25, D. C.

## APPLICATION

I, Godfrey Hemmings, Pres, ASC at Tenple, hereby submit application for the establishment of a unit in the senior division of the Army Reserve Officers' Training Corps at this institution under the provisions of Section 40, National Defense Act, as amended. Attached hereto is a catalog and a statement of particulars with reference to this institution.

## AGREEMENT

1. Contingent upon the acceptance of the above application by the President of the United States and conditioned upon the fulfillment of all promises enumerated in paragraph 2 following, the Secretary of the Army agrees as follows:

a. To establish and maintain a senior division unit of the Army Reserve Officers' Training Corps at the institution named in the foregoing application.

b. To assign such military personnel as he may deem necessary for the proper administration and conduct of the Army Reserve Officers' Training Corps program at the above-named institution and to pay the statutory compensation of such personnel from Department of the Army appropriations.

c. To issue to the institution, at the expense of the Government, upon receipt of properly executed requisitions from the military property custodian, such available Government property as may be authorized by applicable tables of allowances, and pay at the expense of the Government the cost of transportation, packing, crating, and normal maintenance of such property exclusive of cost involved in the storage of such property at the institution.

d. To pay at the expense of the Government and subject to appropriate regulations, commutation in lieu of subsistence at a prescribed rate, to formally enrolled members of the Military Science III and Military Science IV courses, Army Reserve Officers' Training Corps.

e. To pay at the expense of the Government and subject to appropriate regulations, commutation in lieu of the issue of Government uniform clothing at a prescribed rate or rates on behalf of formally enrolled members to whom suitable uniform clothing is not issued at the expense of the Government.

2. Contingent upon the acceptance of this application by the President of the United States, and conditioned upon the fulfillment of the prom-

ises enumerated in paragraph 1 above, the governing authorities of this institution agree as follows:

a. To establish a Department of Military Science and Tactics as an integral academic and administrative department of the institution.

b. To establish and maintain (1) a course of military training (*Military Science I and Military Science II*) of not less than two academic years duration, enrollment in which shall be ☒ required ☐ elective, on the part of undergraduate students eligible therefor, who are not less than 14 years of age, and (2) a course of military training (*Military Science III and Military Science IV*) extending throughout the remainder of the period of the normal undergraduate course, enrollment in which shall be elective on the part of those students who may be selected therefor by the head of the institution and the professor of Military Science and Tactics under regulations to be prescribed by the Secretary of the Army; and to require that each student who shall have been enrolled in any course shall complete that course (which, for a student who has been enrolled in the *Military Science III* course and has agreed to accept a commission in a reserve component of the Army, shall include the acceptance of such commission if tendered) as a prerequisite for his graduation from the institution, unless he is relieved of this obligation by regulations prescribed by the Secretary of the Army.

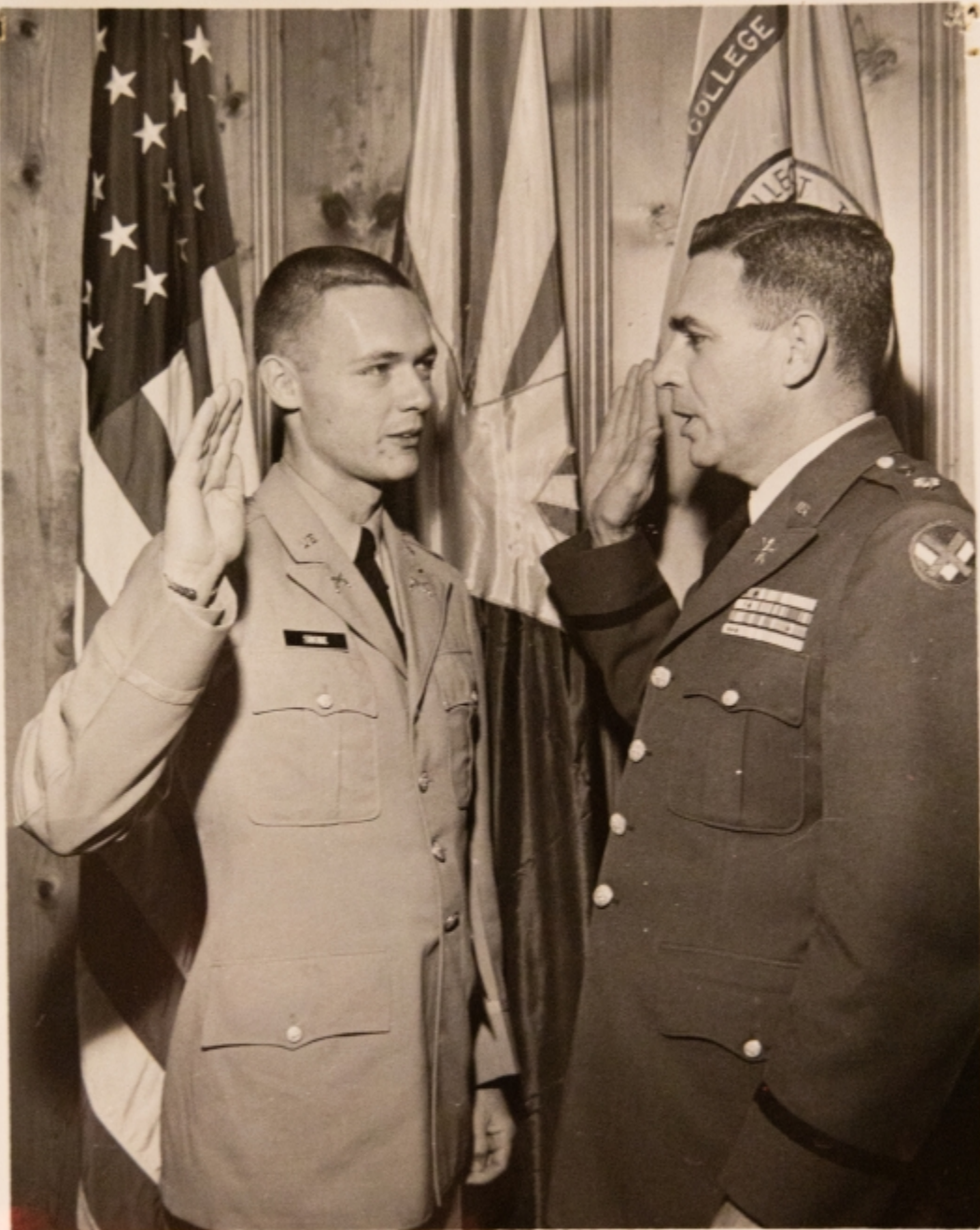
c. To adopt into the curriculum of the institution the military courses or subjects prescribed by the Secretary of the Army; and to require each student (1) who is enrolled in the *Military Science I* or *Military Science II* course to devote not less than an average of three hours per week per academic year to such military course, and (2) who is enrolled in the *Military Science III* or *Military Science IV* course to devote not less than an average of five hours per week per academic year to such military courses, except for medical, dental, pharmacy, or veterinary students for which three hours per week will be arranged.

The original application and agreement for the installation of the Army ROTC program at the then-named Arizona State College.



A 1956 news clipping from the Arizona Republic highlighting different awards the ROTC honors ceremony would present to ASU students.





LT COL FERRELL, PMS&T ADMINISTERS  
THE OATH OF OFFICE TO JAMES SHOBE  
JANUARY 1959.

In January of 1959, James Shobe swears an oath of office.

## WAF Trainees Arrive For Training At ASC

TEMPE, Sept. 22—A group of pretty young WAF trainees is the latest service unit to arrive for training at Arizona State College. Western scenery and hospitality already have endeared them to the state.

"After Texas, this is wonderful," quips Pfc. Kathleen Jett of Bowling Green, Mo.

**THE GROUP** of 25 Wafs agreed that Arizonans are very friendly. And Pfc. Norma Scates of Long Island, N. Y., says "The Arizona scenery is the most impressive I've seen."

Waiting in long lines at the dining hall for meals hasn't dampened their enthusiasm for the campus.

"We're very much used to lines," explains Pfc. Betty McRae of Fremont, Nebr. "All we have in the air force is lines."

**IN FACT**, the group stated that their air force slogan, though certainly not official, is "Hurry up and wait."

Veterans of just eight weeks basic training the Wafs are being flown to the ASC campus at the rate of 25 a week. There they will be trained as secretaries along with 300 airmen who are taking clerk-typist courses.

During the 26 weeks period that Wafs will study shorthand, military correspondence, and typing, a total of 275 servicewomen will arrive on campus for the course.

**THE WAFs** believe their chief mission during their four years in service will be in administrative field.

Already well indoctrinated in service life, they have a typical air force vocabulary including "goof off" for girls who shirk their work and "Li Abners" for their brown combat boots.

While college coeds are required to clean their rooms twice weekly, the Wafs must clean theirs daily in preparation for standby inspections.

**ACCUSTOMED TO** barracks, they find Green Cables, their re-modeled housing unit, more private and not too crowded. After classes, the Wafs may change into civilian clothes and take part in campus social activities.



**Roommates** Pfc. Frances Cantrell, left, West Liberty, Ky., and Pfc. Sonja Cook, Portland, Ore., WAF students, make their bunk beds before inspection in their barracks at Arizona State College at Tempe.

News clipping highlighting the Women in the Air Force program trainees arriving to Arizona State College.





A recommendation of then Cadet Corps commander Candice Stapley in 1978 from a recruitment booklet.



A selection of ASU Saguaro yearbooks featuring ROTC units.

## Gallery





Students in the Naval ROTC program, pursuing careers in the Marine Corps, wake up early to do physical fitness training on the Sun Devil Fitness Complex fields on Tempe campus.



Arizona State University students commissioned into the U.S Navy and Marine Corps prior to graduation in May 2024.



Naval ROTC students finish their morning training before heading to class.





Andrew Veradin oversees the swimming workouts for Naval ROTC.

## Gallery





Jade Goulet, a psychology student in The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, participates in the first Superlab hosted by the Sun Devil Battalion on Sept. 26.



Army ROTC students are taught how to navigate terrain and practice at Papago Park in Tempe, Arizona.





The Sun Devil Battalion takes over the Sun Devil Athletics pools to conduct water training.



Cadet Shiv Patel practices holding his position with a fake weapon during the Superlab on Sept. 26.

## Gallery





ASU student Warren Converse was recognized in front of the Flying Devils due to his courageous actions of helping to save a life by performing CPR while he was getting his hair cut.



Xavier Gacusan, an aerospace engineering student, attends the Air Force career day with his peers.



The University Archives has maintained a handmade Air Force ROTC flag.





Air Force ROTC students finish a successful leadership lab in the early morning on the Tempe campus.