

Guide to Understanding ROTC Programs

You may hear people allude to the ROTC while in high school or when entering college, but if you're unfamiliar with the program, you'll probably glean very little about what the ROTC actually is. The acronym stands for "Reserve Officers' Training Corps," and its goal is to train college students for future service in branches of the U.S. military; the Army, Air Force, and Navy each have their own ROTC programs. Students interested in U.S. Armed Forces service at an early age can also gain exposure to the rigors of military training through JROTC (Junior ROTC) programs offered at the high school level.

The JROTC and ROTC programs share a point of origin: the [National Defense Act of 1916](#). The passage of this legislation united military training resources under a single federal umbrella. This allowed high schools and colleges to obtain military training instructors and supply funding from a single ROTC organization. [Title 10 Section 2031](#) of the U.S. Code describes how JROTC programs provide students with at least three years of military instruction, along with access to uniforms, academic materials, and instructors who have served as U.S. Armed Forces officers. According to numbers published by the U.S. Army, over 274,000 high school students serve as [JROTC cadets](#).

Once students reach college, they can explore specific military branches by enrolling in ROTC programs provided by the Army, Navy, or Air Force. While the U.S. Coast Guard does not have an ROTC initiative, interested students can explore a similar training program, the [College Student Pre-Commissioning Initiative](#) (CSPI). The goal of these college-level programs is to train future officers to serve in the U.S. Armed Forces. To students who qualify, the ROTC programs offer scholarships that cover the cost of their education. In exchange, there is an expectation that students fulfill active duty services in their chosen branch of the Armed Forces.

Types of ROTC Programs

	ARMY	NAVY AND MARINE CORPS	AIR FORCE
Availability	1,100 campus programs	153 campus program	1,100 campus programs
Example Training Topics	Army leadership, military tactics, principles of war, and combat survival training	Summer cruise training, surface warfare orientation, flight time on navy aircraft, and maritime self-defense	Laws of armed conflict, international security, aerospace studies, and field training

	ARMY	NAVY AND MARINE CORPS	AIR FORCE
Service Obligations	3-8 years, depending on scholarship acceptance	Between 3-12 years of active military service, depending on scholarship acceptance and degree level	Between 4-10 years of active duty, depending on contract cadet appointment
Example Career Specialties	Infantry, Military Intelligence, Civil Affairs, Medical Corps	Submarine, Explosive Ordnance Disposal, US Marine Corps, Navy Nursing Corps	Air Battle Management, Aircraft Maintenance, Cyberspace Operations, Piloting, and Tactical Air Control

Why Join an ROTC Program?

There are many reasons to explore JROTC and ROTC programs. Some students join to fulfill the personal goal of following in the footsteps of a family member. Some join for the professional opportunities they have upon graduation. Others are drawn to the ROTC programs out of a sense of patriotism and a desire to serve their country.

Those interested in joining a branch of the ROTC should be:

- Dedicated to the program and their country
- Driven to succeed no matter what obstacles they face
- Disciplined enough to reach their goals

ROTC programs offer prospective and current college students a number of benefits, including:

- An opportunity to develop technical and leadership skills
- A structured path to a career after college
- Specialized professional training for military officer positions after college
- Scholarships that cover tuition, fees, books, and other student necessities
- Long-term career guidance and continued professional education

It is important to remember that ROTC scholarships provide these benefits in exchange for mandatory active duty service after you complete your bachelor's program. So you should carefully examine these commitments, along with your other future goals, before accepting a scholarship or entering a program. Academic advisors and ROTC recruiters can answer your questions so you can make a more informed decision.

Academic advisors are able to help you determine if your planned major will be affected by your involvement with the ROTC program. They will be able to show you when most classes in your major are offered. It may be that training times with the ROTC interfere with the courses you need.

A ROTC recruiter, on the other hand, will be able to answer all of your questions on the rigors of the program. They will be able to provide more information on the scholarships available and the time you will need to commit to the program in order to meet their requirements.

How Does the ROTC Program Work?

FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

Many U.S. high schools have 3 to 4 year JROTC programs run by various branches of the military. You may be eligible to enroll in your school's JROTC program starting in 9th grade. We've provided links below to the detailed curriculum offerings for each type of JROTC, along with details about co-curricular activities you can participate in as a high school cadet.

- **Army (AJROTC):** Raider Fitness Challenges, drill formations, air rifle competitions, and first aid for emergencies
- **Navy (NJROTC):** Navigation instruction, communication electronics, drill ceremonies, ship handling, naval science
- **Air Force (AFJROTC):** Flying model programs, drill formations, flight science, management principles, astronomy
- **Marine Corps (MCJROTC):** Color guard, drill formations, air riflery training, volunteer service, color guard ceremonies
- **Coast Guard (CGJROTC):** Nautical science, drill formations, calisthenics activities

As a high school student, you can still prepare to enter a college ROTC program, even if you haven't participated in JROTC. Start researching prospective ROTC programs early so you have time to apply for training and scholarships.

IN COLLEGE

	ARMY	NAVY AND MARINE CORPS	AIR FORCE
Physical Fitness	Scholarship cadets must pass an Army Physical Fitness Test with a minimum of 180 points	Pass the Applicant Fitness Assessment (AFA) before enrolling in this ROTC program	Scholarship cadets must score at least 75 points on the Physical Fitness Test twice a year. Non-scholarship cadets must take the test, but do not need to pass.
Academics	Complete one Army ROTC elective and lab each semester	Complete required calculus, physics, English, national security, cultural studies, and naval science courses. Attend Summer Cruise Training .	Must not receive below a C-grade in aerospace courses, pass Leadership Labs, and complete the Air Force Officer Qualifying Test (AFOQT) during your junior year.
Alcohol and Drugs	Drug use is not tolerated. Legal alcohol consumption is permitted.	A previous medical history of alcohol and drug abuse disqualifies applicants. No drug use is permitted. Legal alcohol consumption is permitted while off duty. NROTC members are subject to periodic urinalysis tests .	No drug use permitted. Limited legal alcohol consumption is permitted except in Field Training, Professional Development Training, and Leadership Labs.

Academics

Initial acceptance into an ROTC program does not guarantee continued scholarship benefits. Students must adhere to strict academic standards in order to receive continued funding throughout their degree programs. Each military branch has its own rules and regulations regarding your course balance, major selection, and grade minimums. Generally, the AROTC has the [least stringent](#) scholarship programs, providing students with the freedom to explore nearly any major and take two ROTC courses of their choosing each semester. The [NROTC](#) and [AFROTC](#) are more selective about funding majors in specific fields. These military branches tend to prioritize scholarships for students exploring STEM majors or foreign languages.

Disenrollment Repercussions

Once you accept an ROTC scholarship, you are legally required to serve in the military for a specific number of years, as defined by your scholarships, degree program, and career path. Before you sign this contract, it is extremely important you take time to think about how military service fits into your life and future goals, and whether it's a long-term commitment you are willing to take on and see through. If you fail to fulfill your ROTC academic program or active duty commitment, you could face ROTC disenrollment. If you fail to perform your active service duties, you could face serious repercussions. [U.S. Code Title 10 Section 2005](#) explains that disenrolled students may be held to additional active duty order determinations and repayment of ROTC financial assistance.

MILITARY SERVICE COMMITMENTS

Once you obtain your undergraduate degree, your period of military service begins. ROTC prepares you to start at the officer level, so that you do not have to work your way up through entry-level military positions. AROTC graduates start active duty as [Second Lieutenants](#), while NROTC graduates become Navy Ensigns or Marine Corps Second Lieutenants. AFROTC graduates also begin their service as [Second Lieutenants](#). Many students confuse active duty obligations with an actual long-term career in the military. However, once you complete your military service commitments, you have the option of leaving the military to explore other career options. Also, select AROTC graduates have the option of pursuing outside career options right after graduation while fulfilling their service commitments with the [Army Reserve](#) instead. Keep in mind that reserve members may be shifted into [active duty](#) based on the needs of the military branch.

ROTC Scholarships and Financial Aid

ARMY ROTC SCHOLARSHIP OPTIONS

- [Four-Year Scholarship](#): Full tuition, book allowance, and a monthly stipend are offered to current high school students who intend to enroll in a four-year degree program at a participating AROTC college.
 - **Deadline**: All applications must be received no later than January 10th of your senior year in high school.
 - **Application Requirements**:
 - You must be a US citizen between the ages of 17 and 26
 - Minimum cumulative high school GPA of 2.50
 - Receive a high school diploma or pass a high school equivalency test
 - Minimum of 920 on the SAT or 19 on the ACT

- Pass the [Army Physical Fitness Test](#)
- **Service Commitment:** A total of eight years split between the Army and the Individual Ready Reserve
- **Three-Year Scholarship:** Full tuition, book allowance, and a monthly stipend for current college students who still have three years to complete their degree programs at participating AROTC colleges.
 - **Deadline:** Unpublished; speak to a recruiting officer for timeframes
 - **Application Requirements:** See the four-year scholarship requirements listed above
 - **Service Commitment:** Four years of full-time service
- **Two-Year Scholarship:** Full tuition, fee coverage, book allowance, and a monthly stipend for current college students who still have two years to complete their degree programs at participating AROTC colleges.
 - **Deadline:** Unpublished; speak to a recruiting officer for timeframes
 - **Application Requirements:** See the four-year scholarship requirements listed above
 - **Service Commitment:** Four years of full-time service

NAVY / MARINE CORPS SCHOLARSHIPS

- **Four-Year Scholarship:** Full tuition, partial fee coverage, \$750 book stipend, uniforms, and subsistence allowances are provided to students enrolling in a four-year degree program at participating NROTC colleges.
 - **Deadline:** Students should begin the applications process during their junior year of high school. The deadlines are at the end of January for the school year you are applying for. Contact a Navy recruiter for complete timeframes.
 - **Application Requirements:**
 - Navy and Nursing
 - Select a Tier 1-3 [college major](#)
 - Receive minimum scores of 520 Math and 530 Verbal on the SAT and 21 Math and 22 English on the ACT
 - Marine Corps
 - Pass the Marine Corps physical fitness test
 - Minimum combined score of 1000 on the SAT and a minimum combined score of 22 on the ACT
 - Minimum Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT) score of 74
 - **Service Commitment:**
 - A minimum of five years for most applicants, 12 years for medical or dental school students
 - At least four years for Marine Corps or Navy Nurse Corps scholarships

- **Two- or Three-Year Scholarships:** Full tuition, partial fee coverage, \$750 book stipend, uniforms, and subsistence allowances provided to students for the remainder of their bachelor's program at a participating NROTC college.
 - **Deadline:** Speak with a Navy recruiter for precise deadlines. Applications are generally due at the end of January during the year you wish to enroll.
 - **Application Requirements:**
 - Meet the basic requirements of the four-year NROTC scholarship (listed above)
 - Minimum cumulative college GPA of 2.5
 - Must have already earned between 30 and 90 semester hours
 - **Service Commitment:**
 - Minimum of five years for most applicants and 12 years for medical or dental school students
 - At least four years for Marine Corps or Navy Nurse Corps scholarships

AIR FORCE SCHOLARSHIPS

- **Type 1:** Three to four years of full tuition, partial fee coverage, and book stipends are awarded to applicants who enroll in scientific or technical degree programs at participating AFROTC school.
 - **Deadline:** December 1 annually
 - **Application Requirements:**
 - Minimum combined SAT score of 1180 or ACT score of 26
 - Minimum cumulative GPA of 3.0
 - Complete a scholarship interview
 - Complete the **Physical Fitness Assessment**
 - **Service Commitment:**
 - Serve at least four years of active duty
 - Attend summer training
 - Complete required Air Force General Military and Professional Officer courses
- **Type 2:** Three to four years of book stipends, fee coverage, and tuition with a cap of \$18,000 a year are awarded to students at participating AFROTC schools.
 - **Deadline:** December 1 annually
 - **Application Requirements:** See Type 1 requirements listed above
 - **Service Commitment:** See Type 1 commitments listed above
- **Type 7:** Three to four years of book stipends and tuition awards capped at your college's in-state rate are offered to students attending participating AFROTC schools.
 - **Deadline:** December 1 annually
 - **Application Requirements:** See Type 1 requirements listed above
 - **Service Commitment:** See Type 1 commitments listed above

Is the ROTC Right for Me?

JROTC and ROTC programs can provide teenagers and adults with excellent ways to jumpstart their careers. Some of the benefits of these programs include extensive academic funding, specialized military training, leadership development, fitness maintenance, professional development and team-driven experiences. However, students must agree to long-term service commitments with military branches, which range from 3 to 12 years, depending on scholarship acceptance, career choices, and the types of degrees you pursue. When it comes to the ROTC, you are essentially deciding whether or not you'll devote a significant portion of your early adult life to military service and goals.

Pursuing a ROTC scholarship or training program comes with a legally binding contract that obligates you fulfill the requirements of active duty service upon graduation or dropping out of the ROTC program. Think about this decision very carefully, ask questions, discuss your plans with your family, and weigh your options with academic advisors. ROTC programs are not for everyone, but those who have the dedication, drive, and discipline to make it to graduation will benefit from a stable route through college, diverse career opportunities, and a service experience certain to impact them for the rest of their lives.