

## Formative Research for USAFA Leadership Curriculum Development: Sexual Assault Leadership Training (SALT) Focus Group Guide

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### Welcome & Instructions

Hi, thank you for joining us today. My name is [insert interviewer name], and I'll be leading today's discussion; this is [insert note taker name] and [he/she] will be taking notes and helping me make sure I answer all of your questions.

*Screen share verbal consent script.*

We are members of a collaborative research team at the University of Florida and RTI International, working with the US Air Force Academy (USAFA) to enhance the sexual assault leadership training for future officers. You may hear us refer to this as the SALT Study. For your reference, the UF IRB Study number is #IRB202101211, the USAFA SCN is 22-XX, and the OMB Control Number is 0701-XXXX. The feedback you provide today will be invaluable to enhancing Air Force training efforts.

Before you agree to participate, I want to make sure you understand what the SALT Study is about and what you will be asked to do. I will also explain why we've asked you to be in the study, the risks and benefits of the study, how we will protect your information, and who you can speak to if you have questions. Please feel free to ask questions about anything you don't understand at any time by asking your questions aloud or entering them privately into the chat box.

### Purpose

This [focus group/interview] is part of a research study that aims to make recommendations about how USAFA can improve its leadership training related to sexual assault prevention and response. As part of this study, we will talk with SOS trainees who graduated from USAFA. We are interested in your input about what you liked about the leadership training you received at USAFA and about how we might enhance the training to best prepare USAFA cadets for their leadership responsibilities once they leave the Academy.

You were invited to participate in the study because you graduated from the U.S. Air Force Academy within the last 5 years. We are specifically interested in recent graduate feedback because you're not so far out that you have forgotten training, but you're also far enough out to have had independent leadership experiences that might be useful in shaping future training.

- If anyone here is not a recent USAFA graduate, please tell me now aloud or message me privately in the chat. If any participant indicates they are not part of the target group for this session, please ask them to drop off the call and reach out to their study contact to reschedule their focus group/interview for another time.

## **Procedures**

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to respond to questions about your perceptions of leadership training content and delivery at USAFA. Participation is completely voluntary, and you can skip any questions you do not wish to answer without any negative consequences. We will limit the [focus group/interview] to [90/60] minutes.

*Focus groups only:* We ask that everyone here today keep anything shared during the next hour to themselves to respect the confidentiality of other focus group members. We also want to remind everyone that we cannot guarantee that everything will be kept in confidence, so please only share what you feel comfortable sharing while keeping in mind the limits of confidentiality in a group setting.

## **Discomfort and Risks**

To the best of our knowledge, participation in this study poses no more risk of harm than you would experience in everyday life. Although we will not ask about any of your own personal experiences outside of the classroom, you may find some of the questions to be upsetting or stressful. At the beginning and end of our session today, you will be given information about resources that can help you if you need additional support. You may skip any of the questions that you do not wish to answer, and you may discontinue your participation at any time by simply leaving the meeting or signing off zoom.

**5. Benefits:** You are not expected to benefit directly from participation in this research study; however, results from the study could help improve Air Force leadership training and officer response to sexual misconduct.

## **6. Compensation:**

Because you are choosing to participate during your off-duty time, we would like to compensate you \$20 via an Amazon e-gift card, which will be delivered immediately following today's meeting to the personal (non-military) email address you provided when signing up for the study.

**7. Entitlements and Confidentiality:** Your participation today is completely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your decision will have no effect on your status with the Air Force.

The [focus group/interview] is confidential. Your supervisor, fellow trainees, and other colleagues will not have access to this information. There are three possible exceptions:

1. Your information will be deidentified combined with information from other people taking part in the study, and summarized responses may be released to the public.

2. Representatives of the Under Secretary of Defense (Department of Defense) are authorized to review research records as part of their responsibility to protect human research volunteers.
3. Under the Uniformed Code of Military Justice, information with a bearing on a service member's health may need to be reported to appropriate medical or command authorities.

I'd like to review some of the confidentiality information so that we are on the same page.

- We will not share names of anyone who volunteered for the study with anyone in the Military.
- The [focus group/interview] will be transcribed, but the notes we take will not include your name or any other potentially identifying information.
- The information you share with us will be combined with information we receive from other participants, so no one outside of the research team will be able to tell which opinions are yours.
- We would like to record this session as a backup to our written notes. Only the research team will use these audio recordings. If you prefer that we do not record something you want to say, you may choose not to say those things or you may tell us to turn off the recorder.
- All information you provide to the study team will be stored securely by the UF and RTI research team on password-protected computers. Your contact information will always be stored separately from your [interview/focus group] responses. Once the transcripts from this session have been verified, the audio recordings will be deleted.
- We are not asking to discuss your own experiences today--just to give us your opinion about the training you received at USAFA and what might be helpful to include in future trainings. You can refuse to answer any questions or discuss issues brought up during the [focus group/interview].
- You may choose to turn your camera off/on, or to completely end your participation at any time. Please be aware that choosing to turn on your camera may reduce your anonymity if others recognize you.
- *ADDITIONAL INSTRUCTION FOR FOCUS GROUPS:* To protect everyone's privacy, we remind you not to reveal what you hear during today's discussion group to anyone outside of this group.
- We will limit today's discussion to no more than [60/90] minutes.
- We will not contact you after the study is concluded.

**9. Questions:** If you have any questions about participation in the SALT Study, you can ask them now by asking your question aloud or by privately messaging me in the chat.

**10. Consent:** At this time, we would like to ask that you verbally indicate your willingness to proceed and that your decision to do so is voluntary. Do you agree to participate in this [focus group/interview]?

As I mentioned earlier, we would like to record the interview to make sure we don't miss any important information, and [note-taker] will also be taking notes. Once the [focus group/interview] is transcribed, the recording will be deleted.

Do you agree for the session to be recorded?

- o If all participant(s) decline to be recorded, plan to only take notes during the data collection.
- o *Focus groups only:* If only a few participants disagree, ask them to drop off the call and email the study contact to reschedule an individual interview for another time.

- After obtaining consent and permission to record, start the Zoom recording.

We are starting the recording [date] at [time]. Remember, please to do not share any identifying information in our session including your name, initials, or birthday. If you do provide any information that could identify you, that information will be removed from our notes and transcripts.

## QUESTIONS FOR RECENT USAFA GRADUATES AT MAXWELL AFB IN SOS

### Background

**Introduction:** These first few questions are to get you thinking about leadership, broadly defined. You might begin by thinking of a few people you think are strong leaders, or perhaps even a few people you think are not so great at leading.

1. What do you think are the qualities of a strong leader?
  - a. In what ways are these qualities consistent with being a “leader of character” in the Air Force? In what ways do they differ?
  - b. In what ways have your leaders at USAFA and in your positions since then been good role models?
  - c. What types of leadership behaviors have you observed that you want to avoid as a leader?
2. How would you describe the “typical” relationship between a unit leader and subordinate in the USAF?
3. What are some factors that might affect the relationship between unit leaders and subordinates? What about at USAFA in particular?
  - a. Probe: factors can have positive or negative influence

### USAFA Training & Readiness for Duty

**Introduction:** Now think back to when you were at USAFA...

4. Describe the leadership development training you received at USAFA in your own words.
  - a. What did you like or find particularly helpful about this training or education?
    - i. (Possible prompts) Which parts of this training have been particularly helpful since you left the Academy?
  - b. Is there anything you would change about this training? If so, what? Why?
  - c. In what ways could the leadership training have better prepared you to be a leader of character when you became an officer?
5. What kind of training or education did you receive pertaining to recognizing, preventing, or responding to sexual assault and/or sexual harassment?
  - a. What did you like or find particularly helpful about this training? What changes would you make?
  - b. How prepared have you felt to handle situations involving sexual assault or harassment when they come up?

- i. What would help you feel more prepared?
  - ii. How often do situations requiring your SAPR leadership training come up? Do you have a sense of how often subordinates report sensitive information (like incidents of sexual assault, harassment, or hazing) to their unit leaders?
    - 1. Why might they choose to report to leadership? Why might they choose not to?
- 6. What are some topics you would have liked to learn about that were not addressed in leadership training at the Academy?

## **Social environment**

**Instructions:** Thinking now over the time since you've graduated...

- 7. During which events, times of year, or specific situations are new officers at highest risk to experience unwanted sexual touching, comments, or conversations?
  - a. Are there specific times during an Airman's career when people are more likely to come to them seeking help with a situation involving sexual misconduct? (Probe: as a Cadet? A new officer?)

## **Bystander Behavior**

- 8. How often does a typical Cadet or Airman speak up if they hear someone making sexist jokes?
  - a. What makes it difficult to call someone out for using discriminatory language?
  - b. Are Officers more or less likely to speak up than people in other roles? Why?
- 9. How do you think most Airmen would respond if their friend was making sexual comments that were making others feel uncomfortable?
  - a. What if the person making sexual comments was not your friend?
- 10. What do you think most Airmen would do if they saw, for example, a female Airman asleep at a party after consuming too much alcohol?
  - a. What are the things that might stop an Airman from stepping in to help someone in a situation like this? (Probe: Give examples—fear of getting in trouble, misreading the situation)
  - b. Is there anything specific to the military environment that might stop someone from helping? (Probe: career impacts, if one of the members involved is a higher rank)
  - c. What might stop an Officer from stepping in to help?
- 11. To what extent would an Officer be expected to model bystander behavior in order to provide a good example for Airmen? What makes that difficult?
- 12. How comfortable do new Officers feel in their ability to recognize sexual assault if a peer or subordinate were sharing a story about a situation involving sexual assault, even if they didn't label it as such?
  - i. How confident are you that a new Officer could help that person feel supported? What might they do based on the training and guidance they receive as a leader?

## **Reporting & Response**

**Instructions:** Next we are going to ask about situations where someone might come to a new officer or a trusted confidant. We are not asking about your personal experiences, though you may draw on them in responding to the hypothetical scenarios below. This information will be used to guide future leaders in how to respond to reports of sexual assault or harassment.

13. What can new Officers do to earn the trust of their subordinates?
14. What are some barriers to discussing sexual assault and harassment with subordinates?
15. Who can new officers turn to for help to support members of their unit?
  - a. Probe: Mental health providers, medical providers, SARC, Commanders/supervisors
  - b. What makes this person/group trustworthy?
16. What are some of the barriers Airmen face in reporting sexual assault and harassment?
17. What do you think a good leader would do to make survivors feel safe and supported through their reporting process?

### **Unit Cohesion**

**Instructions:** Now think about your current unit.

1. How do members of each unit show each other that they respect one another?
2. What experiences tend to help unit members bond with one another?
3. To what extent do unit members trust one another?
  - a. Prompt: What are some of the characteristics that promote trust between unit members? What characteristics might erode trust?

### **Closing**

18. Do you have any leadership advice for First Class Cadets who will be brand new officers upon graduation from USAFA?
19. Is there anything else you'd like us to know?

### **Closing remarks:**

- Stop the Zoom recording.
- Thank you for sharing your time and knowledge with us today. I know future USAFA leadership training will be stronger because of your feedback and suggestions.
- Instruct participants to enter their personal email address (the one used to sign up for the study) in a private chat to the facilitator if they would like a \$20 Amazon e-gift card sent to them. Assure them their email address will only be used to cross-check their study eligibility and to send the gift card; it will not be included in the transcription, and it will be deleted immediately upon sending payment.
- For all participants: Post resources in the chat and encourage participants to reach out if they feel they want to talk with someone confidentially.
  - Post PI name (Nichole Scaglione) and email address ([nscaglione@ufl.edu](mailto:nscaglione@ufl.edu)) in the chat and encourage participants to contact her if they have any questions about the study.
- Thank them again for their time and participation.
- End the call.