

Graduation Tips

Here are the items we discussed during the Zoom Meeting with Robin Nolan on Tuesday, August 22, 2023.

1. Ask your cadet what they want to do during graduation week. Don't overplan, your cadet still has a lot to do on campus with packing up their rooms and out processing.
2. The Senior Survey that comes out around February is 100% Mandatory for your cadet to complete! This is when they will register for tickets for the special events, parade and graduation. If you need extra graduation tickets, you may contact the Chamber of Commerce (they are given some by USAFA for the public to use) in Colorado Springs. Typically, you are eligible for 20 tickets for graduation and 6 tickets for the parade, but this may change.
3. Book your AirBnB or VRBO as soon as possible, the earlier the better. Anecdotally, AirBnB is typically more \$\$, but seems to protect the renter more than VRBO. Do not reserve anything too far from campus. Robin was 30 minutes away and felt like that was too far. Your cadet is coming and going all week, and it was too much travel time. Other families on FB have mentioned reserving a hotel room as a back-up if your rental home falls through for some reason.
4. There are several events during the week of graduation in addition to the Commissioning Ceremony and Graduation..... Baccalaureate Mass on Sunday, Superintendent Reception on Monday, Memorial Day at Carlton House, a theater production by the Bluebirds Cadet Theater Troupe (several days), and a Superintendent Reception after the Parade at Mitches. There is also an award ceremony on Tuesday, they may not know if they are nominated or getting one until the week before. Your cadet may or may not want to attend these additional events, but registration for all (except the theater production, which is free and first come, first served) will be requested using the Senior Survey. Graduation is the last event of the week.
5. Let's talk meals! Don't plan to cook too much! You don't want to miss spending time with your cadet and family by being at the grocery store or in the kitchen cooking and cleaning. Consider picking up breakfast burritos the night before your early morning (7 am) graduation day departure time. Sandwiches, catered meals, Hello Fresh delivered to AirB&B or making restaurant reservations (about a month in advance) were all great ideas. An inexpensive cooler with ice and water/gatorade in the car at all times was also helpful.
6. The Parade - A very emotional, moving ceremony when your class will "break away" from the Wing. Have a family member video, so Mom and Dad can just be in the moment and watch the parade. Wear comfortable clothes and prepare for all weather. Layers and a poncho are recommended. See items for Clear Goodie Bag below.
7. Commissioning Ceremony (same day as Parade)- There are 10 different places on campus at 4 different times. It is by squadron and each squadron submits their request for place and time and will be assigned based on squadron rank. Robin's son was at the Superintendent's home, but other places were Arnold Hall, Polaris Hall, and outside near Mitch's. The times are: 12:30 pm (directly following the Parade), 3 pm, 5:30 pm, and 8

pm. Business Dress / Sunday Dress for this event, you will want to look your best for pictures. If you have the 12:30 pm time slot, bring clothes in your car that morning when you come for the Parade - do not try to take the clothes with you into the Parade. Change on campus after the Parade and before the Commissioning Ceremony. If you have the 8 pm time slot, have everything ready to go back at your rental house for the next morning, Graduation Day. It will be an early start!

8. Graduation Day - need to be in the stadium by 9 am. They may be strict on that time, so try not to be late. You can also watch from Arnold Hall and it will be live streamed for family back home. Typically, it is a long day... 7:30 am to 1:30 pm. You may want to have a breakfast burrito on the way to the stadium and sub sandwiches in your car cooler to eat after the ceremony while you wait for the parking lot to clear. Have something ready to give to your cadet to eat right after the graduation ceremony. They can visit with you for a few minutes and then they have to get on the bus to go back to campus for out-processing. It may take them an hour to get back to your rental or several hours. Robin planned her "Graduation Dinner / Party" with family on Wednesday night instead of Thursday night, because you are not sure when they will make it back.
9. You may want to have a Goodie Bag for your guests.... Robin prepared one for each couple.
 - a. Clear bag for stadium - cannot bring a regular bag
https://www.amazon.com/Stadium-Approved-Security-Travel-Sports/dp/B06WXX7P2W/ref=sr_1_31?crid=209LOE8RX2XCY&keywords=clear+stadium+bag+blue&qid=1692842827&srefix=blue+stadium+bag+%2Caps%2C108&sr=8-31
 - b. Sealed regular water bottles, 2 per person. Do not open before entering the stadium.
 - c. Emergency ponchos from Wal-mart
 - d. Wooden fans
 - e. Royal Blue sunglasses
 - f. Small hand sanitizer
 - g. Small sunscreen, no spray allowed
 - h. Advil
 - i. Handwarmers
 - j. Chapstick
 - k. 1 hand towel and 1 washcloth to wipe off bleacher seats, may want to choose class color
 - l. 1 gallon size ziplock bag with sandwich, snacks, trail mix, etc
 - m. Button with you cadet's picture
10. You may want to prepare a "Program" for the week. Robin included all the events, interesting facts, addresses and phone numbers of family members. She said she did wish that she had mailed it to her guests before the trip, so they could have it to review. We will include a template for you to use.
11. You may want to purchase Challenge Coins from the AOG Gift Shop. These can be used to give as gifts of appreciation to Grandparents, family members or anyone who

helped get your cadet to this point. This is not the official challenge coin that your graduate will receive.

12. Robin ordered the USAFA graduation announcements and thank you cards, they were very elegant and nice, but she did not end up sending all the announcements out. Her friend created a 2 sided announcement that had her son's picture on the front and the day and time and website for the 2 main events so family members and friends could watch the live stream. She preferred to send that announcement version out instead.
13. You may want to purchase a flag flown at USAFA for your cadet. It may be flown at graduation or their birthday or any other special day. You can order this at any time. The flag shadow boxes are at Hobby Lobby.
14. Robin's son also thought we should add that last parents' weekend he did not want the crest blanket, but that he was super happy when he came home after graduation and it was waiting for him on his bed. One of the first things he packed!
15. Enjoy this special time! Your cadet has accomplished so much and we are proud of all of them!