

Professional Membership

Expectations and Privileges

Col. Todd Schmidt, PhD, U.S. Army

I refuse to join any club that would have me as a member.
—Groucho Marx

When I first came on active duty in the mid-1990s, there were a few things that became very clear to me when I reported to my first unit in the 82nd Airborne Division. I should contribute to the cup and flower fund. I should join the Officer's Club. I should attend all Officer Call events. I should attend all Hail and Farewells. I should join my branch association. I should join my division association. I should donate to the Combined Federal Campaign. I should donate to the Army Emergency Relief Fund. I should join the Command and General Staff College (CGSC) Foundation. I should join the Association of the United States Army (AUSA). I should encourage my peers and subordinates to do the same.

There were certain expectations.

I remember very clearly how senior officers would “highly encourage” young soldiers to join, support, participate, and pay dues to all these different funds, clubs, events, charitable organizations, and associations. I did not ask any questions. As a young lieutenant, I had the resources to comply and meet expectations. I blindly obeyed and followed the advice of my senior leaders. I did it because I was told to do it, not necessarily because I had thought about it and found it was the right thing to do.

In hindsight, in my opinion, it was the right thing to do.

Things have changed, however. Now, after decades of service, I have watched how some practices of the Army's past have evolved. Some good expectations, traditions, and practices have atrophied. Or maybe I am just feeling nostalgic.



Col. Todd Schmidt, PhD, U.S. Army
Director, Army University Press

Regardless, there was an enculturation process that was occurring. Over the course of time, orientation, observation, mentorship, counseling, coaching, and the collective spoken and unspoken expectations of young service members, I was molded into a military professional. I may not have understood the process at the time. In fact, I know that I did not. Why, for instance, were we expected to spit shine our combat boots and starch our camouflage uniforms?

Over time, however, I slowly realized that membership in the military profession required me to support aspects of the military institution, military organizations, and the military mission that go beyond merely putting on the uniform and showing up to work. For example, members of a profession are expected to contribute to the betterment of the profession. This may take the form of intellectual contribution through writing and study. It may also take the form of financial contribution to supporting entities like Army Emergency Relief.

This is not to say that we should not question expectations or our practices, norms, and traditions. On

the contrary, we must also understand and respect our lineage, history, heritage, and the legions of professionals that have served before us. What we may find, with a little reflection, is that we are very privileged to be a part of something exceptional that deserves our contribution.

Over the past year, I have become active with three organizations—the Rotary Club, the CGSC Foundation, and AUSA. With my local Rotary, I support an association of local residents who truly want to give back to their community. Each Friday, at the local community center, we say the Pledge of Allegiance, share breakfast, and listen to and share ideas with one another about how we can improve the lives of individuals in our community and across the globe. I willingly pay to be a part of this wonderful organization.

I joined the CGSC Foundation as a major and became a life member in 2022. The benefits of the foundation are not just for members (though the academic scholarships available for members and their families equate to thousands of dollars each year). If a curious reader investigates all the great support the foundation provides to CGSC and Fort Leavenworth, they will quickly understand that the programs, events, awards, and support CGSC and the local community receives vastly outweighs the support the foundation receives in return from students or the installation. If you are stationed at Fort Leavenworth or attending or attended CGSC, I encourage you to support the CGSC Foundation. You will find that the fiduciary responsibility of this organization ensures that the benefits of membership provide an immeasurable return on investment beyond any annual membership dues.

I paid my lifetime membership to AUSA as a second lieutenant in 1996. Honestly, beyond reading the monthly *ARMY Magazine* and randomly contributing articles for publication over the years, I never considered the benefits or value of AUSA seriously. However, I now volunteer to serve as secretary of the local Greater Kansas City Chapter. The services and support the chapter provides to local ROTC battalions, recruiting offices, active-duty service members, Army Reservists, and National Guardsmen are incredible. An active chapter has the potential to contribute so much to the local community, while also representing and telling the Army's story to our civilian friends and neighbors.

Of course, there are certain privileges that go along with membership, donations, and dues.

If we are brutally honest, we very rarely do anything that does not provide us with some personal benefit. And that is okay, even if that benefit is simply to make us feel good about ourselves—it means we are rational beings. Supporting professional funds, clubs, events, charitable organizations, and associations is the right thing to do.

Over time, the resources or charitable giving we provide to a cup and flower fund, branch association, the Combined Federal Campaign, Army Emergency Relief, the CGSC Foundation, or AUSA benefit members of our military profession, past and present. Participation and support can build and contribute to healthy esprit de corps. Programs and initiatives funded by donations and membership dues help send our children to college, improve professional development and the study of our profession, and provide relief and assistance for struggling soldiers and their families. Some programs also help build relationships with the local community, host foreign military students and representatives, provide networking and job opportunities for retirees, assist veterans in navigating governmental bureaucracy, and so much more.

The satire of Groucho Marx is funny. However, being a cynic is easy. It is too easy to complain about all faults we may find, especially in the Army. And there will always be a chance that someone does something that may cast a shadow on all the great things our professional funds, organizations, and associations do daily. These should not be reasons to not contribute, donate, join, and support. In the past, you may have viewed pressure from senior leaders to support extracurricular causes and activities with cynicism or skepticism. Maybe a poor command climate colored your view.

Regardless, membership in a profession and support of professional organizations and associations is an expectation, particularly as you graduate through the ranks. The return on these investments, however, provides more than you will ever see or be able to calculate. Regardless of expectations, membership has its privileges, and hopefully, you will begin to understand that it is a privilege to serve and contribute, not just to our profession, but to many of the supporting funds, organizations, and associations that support us. ■

FUTURE WARFARE WRITING PROGRAM

Call for Speculative Essays and Short Works of Fiction

Military Review calls for short works of fiction for inclusion in the Army University Press Future Warfare Writing Program (FWWP). The purpose of this program is to solicit serious contemplation of possible future scenarios through the medium of fiction in order to anticipate future security requirements. As a result, well-written works of fiction in short-story format with new and fresh insights into the character of possible future martial conflicts and domestic unrest

are of special interest. Detailed guidance related to the character of such fiction together with submission guidelines can be found at <https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/Military-Review/Special-Topics/Future-Warfare-Writing-Program/Future-Warfare-Writing-Program-Submission-Guidelines/>. To read previously published FWWP submissions, visit <https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/Military-Review/Special-Topics/FWWP-TOC/>.

