UAS program launches leadership development opportunities for cadets

10/4/2013 - U.S. AIR FORCE ACADEMY, Colo. -- Two Academy juniors will break ground for future cadets, leading and instructing Defense Department combat equipment on Academy soil.

Cadets 2nd Class Cori Easter and Jacob Seabury will be the first cadet Small Unmanned Aircraft System Instructors and Evaluators in the Academy’s UAS Airmanship program, allowing cadets to grow as leaders and aviators through the program.

“Being a cadet instructor will be a great opportunity for personal development, as well as to introduce others to an aerial system that is actively being deployed in combat by the United States today,” Seabury said. “Being a cadet instructor isn’t just about teaching people how to fly the aircraft, it’s about developing a flying mindset and broadening the perspective of those involved.”

The UAS Airmanship program, now in its fifth year, is shifting from officers and contractors running the program to cadets. This past summer, select cadets were sent to Hurlburt Field, Fla., to qualify with the RQ-11 Raven, a small hand-launched remote-controlled unmanned aerial vehicle, under the same training course active-duty service members complete to operate the UAS worldwide.

Easter and Seabury were among the elite group, and only need to complete evaluator upgrade training to be able to provide initial evaluations to their classmates.

“We'll get to be the ones to lead other cadets to success,” Easter said. “The Academy is promoting our development as leaders of character, and this program definitely promotes that mission. It's a very a hands-on program for such a unique field for the Air Force. I really want to be (an unmanned aerial systems) pilot once I graduate, and this program does a lot to give you a better understanding of UAVs and what I will be going into.”

George Warton, a site lead for the program, said cadets' ongoing preparations to meet evaluator requirements include in-depth training and evaluation with every facet of the Small Unmanned Aircraft System operations program. Once certified, cadets will have instructing opportunities with three-degree cadets in the UAS program in addition to qualifying as fully certified site leads, who oversee all operations at launch and recovery sites for the Raven.

“The intent is that cadets will run the SUAS program from a leadership, instructor and evaluator perspective,” Warton said. “With cadets running the program from the ground up, the officers and contractors will become mentors to the cadets. We are honored to be part of the process that will continue to grow cadets into competent leaders, instructors and aviators.”

Airmanship programs provide insight and development in the application of airpower in various ways, Warton said.

“Cadets participate in UAS activities throughout the calendar year,” he said. “During the summer programs, 60 cadets enter the program and receive 15 hours of ground instruction and accomplish five flying missions for about three hours of flight time as part of a familiarization program. From the 60 summer cadets, approximately five percent return for an instructor upgrade program during the fall semester. The unique combination of leadership within the context of instructing airpower principles and applications utilizing the Raven are unique within the history of the Academy.”

Seabury said he believes true leadership can only be learned through experience.

“I hope to complete evaluator training by the end of the semester,” Seabury said. “I appreciate everything the UAS program has done to provide opportunities for both personal and leadership development. Thanks to the program, we're able to form a more educated explanation of unmanned systems and are able to educate others regarding the possibilities and advancements in technology that unmanned aerial systems provide today.”