



Position Paper

Considerations for Establishing the United States Space Academy

October 2026

The Presidential Commission on the United States Space Academy, chaired by NASA Administrator Jared Isaacman, convened its first meeting on September 9, 2026. The Commission is charged with proposing key details for the establishment of the Space Academy to prepare the next generation of astronauts, scientists, engineers, operators, entrepreneurs, civil servants, and warfighters and ensure that they are capable of advancing American interests in space. The NSS strongly believes that the United States needs leaders who understand space across the interrelated activities of civil programs, national security activities, and the commercial sector, and that this effort to create a U.S. Space Academy is a positive direction.

American leadership in space has always drawn upon government, industry, universities, the military, and the scientific community. Their respective roles have changed considerably since the dawn of the Space Age. Commercial companies now provide launch, communications, remote sensing, spacecraft, and other capabilities once developed under contract for and operated primarily by government. National security organizations increasingly use commercial systems and services, while NASA has expanded its reliance on commercial partners. Government investment and demand, in turn, continue to influence the development of the commercial space sector.

Future operations will make these relationships more important. Earth orbital operations, cislunar activity, lunar development, orbital servicing, logistics, commercial stations, debris mitigation, and other emerging activities will involve different combinations of public and

private capabilities. Some will have national security implications. Some will be principally commercial. Others will cross those boundaries depending upon the mission. Leadership in that environment requires a broader perspective than any single sector normally provides.

The Unique Culture of the Academy

The United States already has universities with outstanding programs in engineering, science, business, law, policy, and other disciplines important to space. The service academies produce military officers, including officers who enter space-related fields. NASA, the military services, universities, and industry also provide specialized training and professional development. NSS agrees that a new federal academy can and should provide a unique environment for development of a professional space cadre to improve our nation's ability to create and take advantage of future space capabilities. Graduates would understand their particular field in depth while gaining enough experience across the larger space enterprise to appreciate how decisions in one sector affect the others.

For a military officer, that may mean understanding the commercial infrastructure upon which military operations increasingly depend. Someone entering industry should understand the national interests associated with critical space capabilities and the responsibilities that accompany them. Civil space leaders will need to understand how government objectives can be pursued through partnerships that may include federal agencies, international partners, and private companies. It also should incorporate a level of "jointness" that exceeds what that means today in common defense parlance. "Jointness" in space may require new ways of thinking, and that is exactly why this new program will prove to be invaluable. Some of humanity's best team efforts come from the space program; this type of education can accentuate that historical principle. As this goes beyond academic requirement, our view is that it really concerns how future leaders think about the space domain and their responsibilities within it.

Most importantly, a dedicated academy can develop a common professional culture around that responsibility. Technical competence would remain fundamental, accompanied by judgment, ethics, operational understanding, and service. The federal academies have shown that institutional culture can shape leaders in ways that classroom instruction alone cannot easily reproduce. The Space Academy should have that ambition.

Education and Training

Academy cadets should get education and training in all aspects of space system development and operations, including spacecraft operations, satellite command and control, space domain awareness, launch operations, mission planning, robotics, microgravity activities, and space logistics.

Development of professional qualifications should become another part of the Academy's mission. Commercial human spaceflight, spacecraft operations, orbital logistics, robotic operations, and other specialties may develop formal standards as the sector matures. The Academy could help establish and deliver such training when a genuine national or industry requirement develops.

National Service

Federal investment in an Academy education should carry an obligation to serve the United States. The U.S. Merchant Marine Academy provides a useful precedent. Its graduates enter a field with both commercial and national security importance, and their service obligations recognize more than one way of contributing to the country. Space has developed some of the same characteristics.

Military service should be one path for Space Academy graduates. Federal civilian service is another. Additionally, work in designated areas of the U.S. commercial space sector should be able to satisfy the obligation as well.

Military commissioning deserves separate consideration. The Academy should become the preeminent source of officers for the Space Force.

Graduate and Professional Education

The Academy's contribution should not depend entirely upon an undergraduate program. The Space Academy could also provide training for professionals who are already serving in government, the military, industry, universities, and research organizations.

Graduate and professional programs would allow experienced military officers to study alongside commercial executives, engineers, civil servants, operators, and policymakers. Each would bring knowledge of a different part of the space enterprise into the classroom. That exchange has value in its own right. It would also keep the Academy connected to current operations and provide undergraduate students with access to professionals dealing with contemporary problems. As the institution develops, professionals could return at different points in their careers for advanced education or specialized training. The Academy could then serve the space workforce throughout a career rather than only at its beginning.

International Participation

Selected international participation would serve U.S. interests if it is structured carefully. American military and professional education has long created relationships with foreign officers and officials who later assume positions of responsibility in their own countries. Space education offers a similar opportunity. Students who train together develop

professional relationships and a practical understanding of how their respective countries approach common problems. Close allies and partners, including appropriate Artemis Accords nations, would be logical sources of international cadets. Participation should depend upon the U.S. relationship with each country, the program involved, and applicable security requirements. Membership in an international arrangement itself should not guarantee admission.

Technology protection will limit foreign participation in some courses and activities. Those restrictions are manageable and should be incorporated into the Academy's organization and facilities from the outset.

Governance

Congress should approve the Academy's mission before determining its permanent institutional home. NASA has provided important leadership in advancing the proposal and would remain central to the Academy's success under any reasonable structure. NASA also brings experience in science, engineering, exploration, human spaceflight, and relationships with the commercial sector that would be difficult to replicate elsewhere. The proposed Academy, however, would have responsibilities extending beyond NASA's current mission. Military education and commissioning implicate both Department of War and U.S. Space Force equities. Commercial space brings economic and industry considerations. International participation creates additional responsibilities. A national service requirement would require continuing coordination across government and industry. The Maritime Administration (MARAD) and the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy provide useful and relevant examples. MARAD's responsibilities encompass the health of a strategically important commercial sector as well as operation of a federal academy. The NSS Recommends MARAD as a governance model for the U.S. Space Academy. The logical location for such an organization would be within the Department of Commerce.

Cost also belongs in this discussion. A federal academy requires a continuing commitment of public resources. Facilities are only part of that obligation. Faculty, staff, student support, operations, security, training, and maintenance will require sustained appropriations. The Commission should therefore examine what must reside within the Academy and what can be obtained through partnerships. Existing universities, NASA centers, military installations, federal laboratories, and commercial facilities already possess considerable infrastructure and expertise. Using those capabilities could improve the education while avoiding unnecessary duplication.

Institutional Independence

NSS believes that a dedicated federal academy is warranted, and that the institution should have the independence to develop a professional identity of its own. NSS does not

recommend making the Academy a subordinate college or program within an existing university. That approach would capture some educational benefits but make it considerably harder to develop the professional culture that provides much of the rationale for creating an academy in the first place.

Independence does not require self-sufficiency. The Academy should use outside expertise extensively. Students may spend significant portions of their education at NASA centers, military installations, laboratories, universities, commercial facilities, or operational sites. Faculty should move between the Academy and those organizations as well. The institution would retain responsibility for the overall education and professional development of its students while drawing on capabilities already available across the country.

State universities and private institutions may also develop their own space academies or specialized programs. That would be a healthy development. The federal Academy could provide a national professional benchmark while leaving ample room for other institutions to serve regional, technical, or industry requirements.

Conclusion

The creation of a United States Space Academy is a long-term national commitment. Its value will ultimately be measured by the leaders it produces and their ability to serve effectively across a space enterprise that will look very different twenty, thirty, or fifty years from now. NSS believes there is a national need for leaders who fully understand and can evolve the relationships among civil, commercial, and national security space activities. That need is already evident and will grow as American space endeavors expand farther from Earth and become more dependent on interrelated and interconnected U.S. space capabilities.

If established on that basis, the United States Space Academy can help prepare future generations of leaders for responsibilities that are only beginning to emerge today. NSS believes that is the opportunity before the Commission and the standard against which the Academy should be considered.

About the National Space Society (NSS): NSS is an independent non-profit educational membership organization dedicated to the creation of a spacefaring civilization. NSS is widely acknowledged as the preeminent citizen's voice on space, with over 50 chapters in the United States and around the world. The Society publishes *Ad Astra* magazine, an award-winning periodical chronicling the most important developments in space. To learn more, visit www.nss.org.