

SIUE ROTC Cadets Named Army Aviation Officers

by Megan Wieser
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EDWARDSVILLE – Every year, ROTC Cadets nationwide are considered for a spot in the U.S. Army's 17 branches based on evaluations of academic, leadership and physical performances. Three Southern Illinois University Edwardsville Army ROTC Cadets have been named Army Aviation Officers after participating in the competitive 2020 assessment process.

SIUE seniors Elijah Blecha, Kevin Kerkemeyer and Shalynn Woolsey were selected for the U.S. Army Aviation Branch based on their assessments compared to 6,000 cadets nationwide. In addition to taking a talent aptitude assessment, the trio passed the Selection Instrument for Flight Training (SIFT) test and a flight physical to meet the requirements for aviation duty.

“Of the 3,300 cadets that were selected for active duty, only 156 were selected for aviation,” explained Major Michael Stultz, SIUE assistant professor of military science. “Every cadet in the SIUE ROTC program that met the requirements and wanted aviation this year was selected to attend Army flight training and the Basic Officer Leadership Course to become Army Aviators. Having this many selected is rare at any program.”

Upon completing flight training, selected cadets will be qualified to operate Army aircrafts and lead other pilots and aircraft maintainers.

Blecha, a geography major from Shiloh, is excited to fulfill his dream of flying while continuing to pursue a leadership role.

“Growing up outside of Scott Air Force Base, I was always mesmerized by the ability to fly,” said Blecha. “I chose the Army because of family ties and knowing it was the best fit for me.”

As an Aviation Officer, Blecha will be responsible for the welfare of his soldiers, the progression of non-commissioned officers and warrant officers, the operational ability of his unit’s aircraft, and overall mission success.

“I hope to inspire young men and women to better themselves daily,” added Blecha. “I’ve been given great opportunities and mentorship throughout my young career, and want to provide those same things to others I encounter along the way.”

Kerkemeyer, a computer management and information systems (CMIS) major from St. Charles, Mo., shares a similar dream of flying while serving the U.S. Army.

“I always found flight to be an abnormal and exciting pursuit by mankind,” explained Kerkemeyer. “All of the branches in the Army are great, but only one has aviation assets. During an ROTC training event, a UH-60 Black Hawk came to campus and took us on some flights around St. Louis. I was sold.”

“Being selected as an Army Aviation Officer is a goal that I have pursued throughout college,” continued Kerkemeyer. “The job is unique, and I couldn’t pass up this opportunity.”

After flight training, Kerkemeyer aspires to fly one of the Army's main airframes.

For more information on the SIUE Army ROTC program, visit siue.edu/rotc.

Southern Illinois University Edwardsville provides students with a high quality, affordable education that prepares them for successful careers and lives of purpose to shape a changing world. Built on the foundation of a broad-based liberal education, and enhanced by hands-on research and real-world experiences, the academic preparation SIUE students receive equips them to thrive in the global marketplace and make our communities better places to live. Situated on 2,660 acres of beautiful woodland atop the bluffs overlooking the natural beauty of the Mississippi River's rich bottomland and only a short drive from downtown St. Louis, the SIUE campus is home to a diverse student body of more than 13,000.

A UH-60 Black Hawk flies over the SIUE campus.