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## NEWS & VIEWS

## Col Christopher McClernon

*ORTA and Associate Dean at the U.S. Air Force Academy in Colorado Spring, CO*

When you hear “United States Air Force Academy”, you may visualize wide-eyed cadets marching in unison or the iconic Cadet Chapel with its 17 soaring spires. But to Col. Christopher McClernon it is more than just the premiere military academy for aspiring Air Force officers, it is also the catalyst for innovation supporting all institutional research for the United States Air and Space Forces.

McClernon, the Associate Dean for Research and the Director of USAFA’s Office of Research, leads the Air Force’s Office of Research and Technology Applications, or ORTA, at the Academy. ORTAs are responsible for developing collaborative interactions with industry, academia, and other government entities through an Air Force program called Technology Transfer and Transition (T3).

“T3 is still a relatively new concept at USAFA,” McClernon said. “My biggest role as an ORTA is to ensure our USAFA faculty are aware of transfer/transition opportunities, and then shepherd them through that process.” Much of that process involves pairing interested external partners with researchers at USAFA. “I have an amazing team that assists greatly with all of our T3 activities. Managing these thrusts while complying with all relevant policies is incredibly important and rewarding.”

There are 39 ORTAs in the United States, located at 18 Air Force bases and the Pentagon, as well as the Academy. McClernon’s office conducts research in 23 academic departments and 27 research centers, with some of the larger centers focusing on aeronautics, aircraft structures, astronautics, physics, and a host of others. Keeping warfighter effectiveness in mind, McClernon points out, “all of our researchers are encouraged to engage with USAF and USSF customers, and to include cadets in their research.”

USAFA’s ORTA currently has 142 Cooperative Research and Development Agreements with external companies, corporations, and universities. Some of their biggest

collaborations are with large government contractors like Lockheed Martin, Boeing, and Northrup Grumman.

“We are also excited about the recent addition of smaller companies to our partnerships, including the Stephenson Stellar Corporation, a non-

profit research and development company that serves as a collaborative partner in the space domain,” McClernon adds.

McClernon’s current assignment, which began in 2019, marks the third time he has been stationed at USAFA. With a Master of Science degree in Industrial Engineering and a Ph. D. in Modeling and Simulation, he feels these combined experiences has prepared him for this role.

“I see the role of an ORTA as a servant leader,” states McClernon. “All USAFA faculty and their potential external partners are my customers, and I get great satisfaction out of facilitating these relationships and resulting research activities.”

When sharing how he views his relationship with his team of researchers and cadets, McClernon proudly exclaims, “I have an amazing team and I love my job!”

To learn more about the United States Air Force Academy Office of Research, please visit [www.usafa.edu/research/office-of-research/](http://www.usafa.edu/research/office-of-research/), or e-mail Colonel McClernon at [chris.mcclernon@usafa.edu](mailto:chris.mcclernon@usafa.edu).



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