



OPINION

Canada's military colleges must set high standards to develop our next set of army leaders

LAWRENCE STEVENSON

CONTRIBUTED TO THE GLOBE AND MAIL

PUBLISHED MAY 3, 2025

FOR SUBSCRIBERS

This article was published more than 6 months ago. Some information may no longer be current.





Kingston, Ont., on May 19, 2025.

LARS HAGBERG/THE CANADIAN PRESS

Listen to this article[Learn more](#) about audio

05:20

1.5X

Lawrence Stevenson is the managing partner at Clearspring Capital, the founder and former CEO of Chapters, and a member of the RMC Class of 1978.

The students at Canada's two Canadian Military Colleges (CMCs) have embarked on careers that may require them to protect our country and way of life by putting their lives at risk. Given the high level of performance expected of them, it is essential that their training is more demanding than what is expected of other university graduates.

A recent report examining the culture and structure of military colleges has missed the target, forgetting that military leadership is not meant to be easy.

The Report of the Canadian Military Colleges Review Board, published in April, said that "What Canada does not need from the CMCs is for them to be civilian university equivalents that simply add fitness, language and military training requirements into packed academic schedules that have little specific nexus to the Canadian Armed Forces." But that is exactly what we do need: A demanding academic program that will challenge a student at any university, plus fitness, and second-language and military training. It is meant to be difficult and we should be setting the highest possible training and performance standards to identify and develop our next set of military leaders.

Opinion: How to crack Canada's military recruitment and retention problem

They need to be battle-tested, developing the skills and experience required to lead our military into the future. The report goes on to say that "no matter how smart, developed or capable they might be as individuals, naval and officer



been expected when you compose a review board made up of six civilians with no military experience and one military officer. The military colleges have provided outstanding leaders for more than a century and a half. What nation would ever ask civilians to design a military academy?

Do you want our officers learning leadership skills for the first time on the job, when their lives and those of their soldiers could be at risk? If they are old enough to die for us, then we have a duty to teach them how to lead in the stress of combat, which our CMCs can provide by placing senior cadets in leadership roles, under the right supervision and coaching. These extraordinary leadership skills are exactly what has helped build the character and capabilities of the graduates over decades.

The board also recommends lowering the physical fitness standards, which makes no sense given the physical demands of modern warfare. They also want the officer cadets to get more sleep. Military leaders are expected to carry more than the minimum load, both physically and mentally, and often to do it without having more than a few hours of sleep. They also recommend that the first year at military college include no military-specific components, yet the graduates themselves told the review board that they have not received enough military training.

Opinion: Canada is reaping the under-resourced military that it sowed. Here's how we can make real change, right now

The review board also recommends ending the gruelling recruit camp that cadets attend before first year starts. The first-year orientation program is a core part of the introduction to the military world when recruits first arrive at military colleges. The report admits that the first-year orientation program is “deeply ingrained in the culture” and “stands as a cornerstone of the military training regimen,” and yet, they would axe it.

In my experience, most military academies around the world have some form of this recruit camp. It is critical to team-building and is a great source of pride



under harsh conditions with limited sleep, which I had to pass before I could join the airborne regiment.

The Canadian Military Colleges Review Board's report solidly supports the continued existence of our two Canadian military colleges. They write that the colleges "should be a source of pride for Canadians, and should be better leveraged as a source of national power for the country." I wholeheartedly agree with this sentiment.

Opinion: Carney waves the flag for military spending

The report points out several key statistics that highlight the tremendous value of our military colleges. Graduates of the colleges represent 33 per cent of the Canadian officer corps and yet account for 58 per cent of our colonels and 67 per cent of our general officers. Additionally, military college graduates have better retention rates and they also have higher percentages of women and visible minorities than the officer corps overall.

In fact, the last six chiefs of the defence staff have all been military college graduates, including Jennie Carignan, the first-ever woman to hold the role. Two of the six last chiefs of the defence staff, Tom Lawson and Walt Natynczyk, graduated a year after me at the Royal Military College of Canada. The military colleges have indeed produced generals, but they have also produced many "captains of industry" – the cover headline in a Canadian Business magazine decades ago, which included great Canadian business leaders such as former CAE Inc. head Robert Brown, former Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan head Jim Leech, former Cognos CEO Michael Potter and current Canso CEO John Carswell.

The report's final words send an important message: "Canadians from across the country ... must rally behind their military colleges, demanding excellence, yes, but also celebrating what they stand for, what they contribute and what they can achieve."



tremendous pressure to raise the amount of money that we invest in our forces. Our men and women in uniform are outstanding but they have not been given the tools or the funding to ensure that they can fulfill Canada's and NATO's commitments. The military colleges are a very important part of these commitments and they must remain rigorous and strong.

Sign up for the Opinion Newsletter. Keep your opinions sharp and informed with a helpful summary of The Globe's most provocative columns, covering politics, world affairs, business, arts, health and the way we live

+ SIGN UP | **EXPLORE NEWSLETTERS**

[Report an editorial error](#)

[Report a technical issue](#)

[Editorial code of conduct](#)

Related stories



Military police's resistance to civilian oversight has 'worsened,' watchdog says



Here's what Trump said in his address to the nation after U.S. struck Iranian nuclear facilities



As it hosts G7, Canada under pressure to further boost military spending by tens of billions 🔑

More from Opinion