

Strategic Studies Fellows Program: Broadening Seminars for Army Leaders

One of the first warrant officers to attend the HQDA Strategic Broadening Seminars reflects on the lessons he learned.

■ By Chief Warrant Officer 4 Donald R. Ungerecht Jr.

One of the newest terms circulating throughout the Army is “broadening.” Last summer I was given the chance to take advantage of one of the best broadening opportunities that the Army offers—the 2014 Headquarters Department of the Army (HQDA) Strategic Broadening Seminars conducted at the University of North Carolina (UNC) at Chapel Hill. The seminars are offered as a part of the UNC-IDB [Institute for Defense and Business] Strategic Studies Fellows Program (SSFP).

The SSFP is administered by the IDB and is a collaborative effort among UNC, Duke University, Indiana University, the Triangle Center on Terrorism and Homeland Security, and the Triangle Institute for Security Studies.

The primary focus of this course is to enhance critical and strategic thinking. This program offers Soldiers the opportunity to learn these skills in one setting from some of the top academic institutions.

Enrollment, which had been limited to captains in the past, was opened to warrant officers and senior noncommissioned officers for the first time in 2014.

My class was made up of a wide range of officers, warrant officers, noncommissioned officers, and Department of the Army civilians. This mix of Soldiers and civilians made for one of the best learning environments that I have ever experienced.

The Application Process

When I saw the announcement for the strategic broadening seminars last spring, I jumped at the opportunity to be taught by professors who are at the top of their fields of study and have experience in national strategic policy. I did not know if I had the right qualifications to get selected, but I knew I wanted to at least compete for one of the programs.

Creating the board application packet for the seminars was a two-part process: completing a board selection packet and a post selection process. First, I reviewed the eligibility criteria to see that I met all the prerequisites. Once I saw that I met all the criteria, I completed the request for personnel action required to apply for the course.

The board selection packet also required a letter of recommendation from a general officer. This proved to be a little challenging since I was away from my duty station. However, my chain of command was very supportive and worked with the commandant of the Army Engineer School to secure the letter of recommendation.

The second part of the application process included applying for admission to Indiana University and filling out an IDB registration form after my selection. I also had to write a biography, resumé, and short essay on what strategic studies meant to me. From start to finish, the process as a whole was

smooth and well planned by the staffs at both the HQDA G-3/5/7 and the IDB.

Educational Demands

My educational experience began even before I arrived in Chapel Hill. We were given reading assignments in *The Way of the Knife* by Mark Mazzetti to get us started. The book would be used as a reference during class discussions. (We also met Mazzetti during our course and discussed his experiences conducting research for the book.)

The program requires quite a bit of daily reading to prepare you for the next day’s class. Students must remain disciplined with their reading in order to participate in class discussions.

One of the first things we were told after we arrived was to suspend disbelief. Dr. Hugh O’Neill said this to get us thinking about all the possibilities that were out there to solve a problem.

Classroom Challenges

The course focused on various national security topics, executive management, strategic thinking, decision-making, negotiations, public speaking, and diplomacy. Our core group of professors created a challenging path that kept us engaged and focused.

Professor David Schanzer, the director of the Triangle Center on Terrorism and Homeland Security, led spirited classroom discussions

that were designed to make students take a stance on controversial national strategy topics and then defend their positions. At times he would challenge both sides of the discussion to test students' passion and resolve. It was a learning environment unlike any that I have seen in the Army education system.

The faculty would put us in positions to make decisions that helped us understand why and how decisions at the strategic level are made.

Television Interview Process

One of the most interesting parts of this course was the television interview process. We were given five or six different news stories to read the night before our media relations class. On the day of the class, we were taken into the campus television studio and interviewed on one of the subjects by professor Jim Heffner.

I was completely comfortable in the situation until I realized that the bright lights and camera were on and he started rattling off questions that used my own words against me. I can see how little things you say can get twisted in the production room of a news agency. It made me realize how much preparation goes into a simple five-minute interview. It was a truly humbling and eye-opening exercise.

Scenario Analysis

The most challenging and rewarding part of the seminar was our scenario analysis. Over the course of the five-week program, we were broken into 10 small groups and given a problem statement we used to create a strategic options proposal. At the end of the process, we delivered a 20-minute briefing on our proposal to a distinguished panel from the IDB.

My group's problem statement was, "How should the United States define its security interests and implement a plan for advanc-

ing them in the Middle East, in light of persistent violence and instability in key Arab nations, the strategic threats from Iran, and the seemingly intractable Israeli-Palestinian conflict? What is the Army's role in this U.S. strategy?"

We worked through the scenario planning model that was taught throughout our course. The faculty

stead of looking for an immediate fix to whatever is in my way, I look for what caused the problem to occur in the first place and how I can create a scenario that prevents the issue from returning.

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made sure that we were given the right tools to continue our projects at just the right time in the course.

With the assistance of Dr. O'Neill and our team's assigned mentor, retired Marine Corps Lt. Gen. Richard Kramlich, we navigated the project steps and presented our options and recommendations for U.S. policy in the Middle East for the next 20 years. Although this was a very challenging project, it showed us the benefits of using this type of analysis in military applications.

Takeaways

I am not sure that I have started to realize all the ways that this experience will benefit me, but as I remember my time in this course, I know that I will continue to learn more. It was a lot to take in during a five-week program.

Going into this, I thought I understood how the government and military worked. I have been told by my past leaders and have since told my Soldiers to see how we fit into the "big picture" when we are discussing our part of a mission. I realized during the course that what I thought of as the big picture was very small in comparison to what I was learning.

This course definitely honed my critical thinking and analysis skills. I have already seen changes in the way that I approach a problem. In-

the skills that are becoming critical to doing more with less. During our mentorship meeting, Gen. Raymond T. Odierno, Chief of Staff of the Army, noted that programs like this have not been available in the past. This made me realize that the Army is making an investment in the future of our leaders by funding this program.

I hope that logistics Soldiers across the Army take the opportunity to develop themselves both personally and professionally through these broadening opportunities.

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