

# The Strategic Broadening Seminars Prepare Leaders for the Complexities of Tomorrow

A logistics officer used a postgraduate program as a broadening experience to become a strategic thinker.

■ By Capt. Kwansah E. Ackah

**T**he Army's Strategic Broadening Seminars (SBSs) introduce junior and midcareer leaders to the discipline of strategic planning. The postgraduate seminars are part of the Strategic Studies Fellows Program.

The seminars range in duration from three to five weeks and take place at eight civilian and military academic institutions in the United States, Great Britain, and Israel. Participants are exposed to new concepts that challenge their preconceived ideas about military, business, and economic problem-solving and conflict resolution.

The Office of the Chief of Staff of the Army and the Army G-3/5/7 asked the Institute of Defense and Business at the University of North Carolina (UNC) to develop the program five years ago. The objective was broad, and the Army had one stipulation: the program and curriculum could not resemble any existing military program.

## The Selection Process

SBS seats are advertised through military personnel messages posted on the Human Resources Command website. While prospective participants are asked to indicate a location preference, selections and assignments are at the discretion of the Army G-3/5/7. A participant is assigned to a particular seminar location based on factors such as military

occupational specialty, branch, file strength, and availability of funds.

The SBS is a fully funded program with no strings attached. There are no additional active-duty service obligations, no restrictive post assignments, and no cost to parent units. Graduates earn additional skill identifier 6Z (strategic studies graduate), which is annotated on their enlisted record briefs or officer record briefs.

## Program Experience

I had the opportunity to attend a four-week SBS at UNC in 2016. The schedule was hectic. On a daily basis, the list of guest lecturers included professors, doctors, politicians, active duty and retired general officers, and senior executives who offered thought-provoking questions that required students to prepare for class and pay attention.

**Week one.** The first week included a visit to a Marine Corps veteran-run organization that donates food worldwide. The goal for the visit was to learn the organization's strategies and to offer strategic solutions. It was an opportunity for students to practice newly acquired skills, spend time away from the classroom, and engage in community service.

**Week two.** During the second week, instruction was heavily focused on negotiation skills, global financial securities, power strategies, and strategic innovation. Simulations and role-playing scenarios allowed

students to hone their negotiation skills and practice applying appropriate strategies to a variety of complex situations. The classes were interactive, allowing students to engage and discuss several negotiation scenarios and outcomes.

Required reading assignments averaged between 150 and 250 pages per night. Groups were assigned topic scenarios for the final projects. The groups were also assigned a retired general officer or civilian executive mentors who offered in-depth knowledge in their focus areas.

**Week three.** During the third week, students developed interview skills and explored how the media's portrayal of current events can frame public opinion and affect strategic planning. We also visited a TV studio, conducted mock interviews, and explored how military strategists can employ the media as a problem-solving tool and a means for strategic messaging.

Students visited a solar energy company and an analytics software company. We met with the vice chief of staff of the Army, who expounded the importance of staying engaged and informed in order to provide superiors with feasible strategic options to address future challenges.

**Week four.** By week four, each group had already completed multiple meetings with their mentors, a dry-run presentation, a strategic messaging-check presentation, and a

group briefing to a panel of professors. The focus of week four was to complete the assigned project and capstone paper and prepare for the final brief. The final brief was a two-round presentation that allowed each group to address a problem using the critical thinking skills developed throughout the program.

The program concluded with a formal dinner where graduates were awarded a joint certificate from UNC and Indiana University worth 1.5 graduate-level credit hours and membership into the Strategic Studies Fellows Program.

### **Why Apply?**

The ability to successfully support the warfighter relies heavily on the ability of leaders to forecast requirements. The right forecasting re-

quires the ability to see the problem at hand, anticipate future needs, and derive appropriate support.

SBS is an opportunity to meet and learn from current and former Department of Defense senior leaders, political leaders, and some of academia's best professors who have decades of experience working in the defense realm. More importantly, it is an opportunity to expand your thinking, engage peers, and establish long-lasting relationships.

Every junior to mid-level Army leader should consider applying to this program. They will embark on a unique journey through state-of-the-art approaches to problem-solving.

Successful entrepreneurs will engage students in conversation and mentor them in ways that provide insight into operational models that

have yielded measurable success in the private sector. Esteemed professors will guide them in understanding how to use these lessons in military strategic operations.

After this course, I returned to my duty station a more adept and innovative strategic thinker. Because of this broadening experience, I can say confidently that today I am a stronger leader and a better Soldier.

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- Ensure your article is appropriate to the magazine's subjects, which include Army logistics, human resources, and financial management.
- Ensure that the article's information is technically accurate.
- Do not assume that those reading your article are Soldiers or that they have background knowledge of your subject; *Army Sustainment*'s readership is broad.
- Write your article specifically for

*Army Sustainment*. If you have submitted your article to other publications, please let us know at the time of submission.

- Keep your writing simple and straightforward.
- Attribute all quotes to their correct sources.
- Identify all acronyms, technical terms, and publications.
- Review a past issue of the magazine; it will be your best guide as you develop your article.

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