
EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Teaching Democracy at the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation

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[The views, opinions, and/or findings contained in this report are those of the author and should not be construed as an official Department of the Army position, unless so designated by other official documentation.]

At its biannual meeting in December 2002, the Board of Visitors (BOV) of the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHINSEC), which reports directly to the Secretary of Defense, praised the quality of the Institute's human rights program. It went on to recommend increased emphasis on the teaching of democracy so as to bring that part of the program up to the same high standard. As the BOV emphasized, Congress charged the Institute in its founding legislation (10 USC 2166) with providing professional education and training to military, law enforcement and civilian personnel of the Western Hemisphere "within the context of the democratic principles of the Organization of American States (OAS)." The BOV further noted that "promoting democratic values, respect for human rights and knowledge and understanding of U.S. customs and traditions" were specified in the original charge.¹

The human rights program praised by the BOV has evolved since the founding of the Institute in 2001 and is taught at the beginning of all of the Institute's more than twenty classes. Instruction consists of a minimum of eight hours of human rights training in law, ethics, rule of law and practical applications in military and police operations. Depending on the length of the class, the number of hours of human rights instruction increases proportionally up to the only yearlong class at the Institute, the Command and General Staff Officer Course (CGSOC), which has over forty hours of human rights instruction. Included in this instruction are lectures on international laws and instruments governing human rights, trips to the nearby Andersonville National Historic Site honoring prisoners of war, guest speakers, case studies, conference, and practical exercises.²

As the BOV noted, however, the democracy part of the curriculum was less robust and more dispersed. Instead of a single block of eight or more hours of instruction concentrated at the beginning of each course, like the human rights program, it consisted of several loosely connected pieces scattered throughout each course. Further, unlike the human rights program, which is taught by a group of instructors working together within the same division, there was little coordination among the democracy pieces as the persons teaching them came from several different divisions.

1 *Floyd D. Spence Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2001*, signed October 30, 2000, Section (10 United States Code 2166). Web site: www4.law.cornell.edu/uscode/22/2347.html on December 7, 2004.

2 Russell W. Ramsey and Antonio Raimondo, "Human Rights Instruction at the U.S. School of the Americas," *Human Rights Review*, April-June 2001, Vol. 2, No. 3, p. 92-116.

Two elements comprised the main features of the democracy program:

- The two-hour block of instruction on the Armed Forces and Democracy, taught by the Department of State Chair for Advanced Studies, stressed the intellectual and constitutional basis of U.S. democracy, due process of law, rule of law and civilian control of the military.
- The Informational Program, initiated by the public law that governs security assistance as set forth in the August 1994 Handbook, is designed to expose international students to U.S. democratic institutions in action, to teach students about the basis of U.S. democracy and to inform them about U.S. customs and traditions.³ The basic building blocks of this program are class trips to see U.S. democracy in action. All classes make day trips to the nearby cities of Columbus and/or Atlanta to study the distinctions and interfaces between local, state and federal governments. The two longest classes, the forty-nine-week CGSOC and the sixteen-week Captains' Course, also go to Washington, D.C. for a week.

Although all parts of the democracy and informational programs were well taught, well received by students and recognized for their own worth by the BOV, the perception was that the sum was somehow less than the parts. That perception, together with the outstanding success of our human rights program, led the BOV to recommend that the Institute strengthen the democracy program by increasing the focus on inculcating democratic values and civilian control of the military. In so doing, the BOV stressed that human rights is a part of democracy, a very important part, but still less than the whole.

Planning and Implementing the Democracy Program

The Commandant accepted the recommendation of the BOV and, in early 2003, the Institute began a phased series of steps to more closely integrate those pieces into a fully coordinated and enhanced Democracy and Human Rights Program.

The first step was a detailed analysis of the existing programs by the Academic Dean and the Department of State Chair. The analysis made clear that all of the material required by the founding legislation was being taught. The problem was that it was being taught in a variety of venues in the Human Rights Program, in the Armed Forces and Democracy block and in the Informational Program. The obvious solution, particularly given resource constraints, was to integrate all the existing pieces into a single unified program and then enlarge, enhance or modify them as necessary. Development began with a rewritten description of the unified program, now officially titled the Democracy and Human Rights Program, which was posted on the Institute website in April 2003.⁴ The new description emphasized the close linkage between democracy and human rights and described the integrated approach of the new program.

The Armed Forces and Democracy block of instruction was rewritten and expanded from two to three hours and linked more directly to the values inculcated in the human rights class. Renewed emphasis was placed on how civilian control of the military grew naturally out of the democratic, constitutional roots of U.S. society and history. The armed Forces and Democracy block follows closely after the human rights instruction at the beginning of each course. Both are followed by a combined one-hour examination to test student understanding of the key concepts taught and to underline the linkage of the two blocks. Each student must receive a minimum grade of 70 percent to graduate from the course and the grade on the democracy and human rights

³ The objectives of the *DoD Informational Program Handbook*, called the Field Studies Program since May 27, 2004) found on December 7, 2004 at the Home Page of the U.S. Army Security Assistance Training website: www-satfa.monore.army.milsatfa.htm under the heading DoD field Studies Program, Introduction to IP, while the entire program is under the heading IP Handbook.

⁴ *Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation Course Catalog*, 2002-2003, p. 9-12.

examination is factored into the course grade of all classes at the Institute since May 2003. Initial response to the expanded Armed Forces and Democracy Class, taught by the Department of State Chair, has been enthusiastic with student questions often carrying the class beyond the planned three hours.

The next step was the preparation of one-page guide sheets based on the learning objectives set by the Security Assistance Program. They contain specific historical background and suggested appropriate questions for all places visited during Informational Program trips in the Columbus-Atlanta area, twenty-one guide sheets were initially prepared by the Columbus Police Department.⁵ The guide sheets were designed for use by both students and the U.S. instructors who accompany each trip. The intent is to have clear learning objectives for each stop on each trip, together with sufficient background and suggested questions for government officials about the institutions visited, so that students come away with a clear idea of what they saw and heard and why it is important.

Since July 2003, U.S. instructors have been required to accompany, actively teach and keep students focused on the learning objectives for each trip. As part of the preparation for enhancing the democratic experience of the students, all instructors at the Institute receive the Human Rights and Armed Forces and Democracy blocks during the required TRADOC-designed Instructor Training Course (ITC), plus a special two-hour block of instruction in implementing the democracy learning objectives of the Informational Program trips as set forth in the guide sheets. In essence, the Department of State Chair taught the trainers before they instructed students on the U.S democratic and constitutional values for each trip site. To involve instructors and course directors more directly in the Democracy and Human Rights Program, they are required to meet with the Department of State Chair and the Informational Program coordinator prior to each trip to plan in advance which of the twenty-one stops best fit the class and to discuss the learning objectives for those stops. The Course Director also has to include the Informational Program tour plan and objectives in the Course Implementation Brief (CIB) given to the Commandant prior to each course to maintain focus on those objectives.

Equally important, one hour was set aside in every class before each trip to prepare students for what they will be seeing, what we expect them to learn from those observations and suggested questions to be asked at each stop to further enhance understanding and clarify key points. The Department of State Chair usually conducts these briefing classes. During the trip, the accompanying U.S. instructor uses the guide sheet to reinforce the learning objectives and enhance the value of the trip. Following the trip, the Chair conducts a one-hour post-trip class to review lessons learned, answer additional student questions and underline key points. The principle followed to lock in the learning objectives of each stop on the trip is a classroom version of the advice given to beginning speechmakers:

Tell them what they are going to see and why, show it to them under guided conditions, and then tell them what they saw and why.

Students learn to link their classroom lessons about democracy, federalism and constitutional rights directly to such local and state institutions as the city council, police headquarters or the local newspaper.

The guide sheets and the preparatory and review classroom hours were implemented in July 2003 with the new Command and General Staff Course, the only WHINSEC course with U.S.

5 Event Information Sheet: Columbus Police Department.

students, the largest class at seventy-four and the longest at forty-nine weeks. Other courses beginning in July also incorporated the enhanced Democracy and Human Rights Program.

To underscore the importance of the enhanced program and his commitment to it, the Commandant briefed the assembled Institute faculty and staff at an End-of-Month meeting in June and the Department of State Chair conducted a professional development session (OPD/NCOPD) for all officers and non-commissioned officers a few weeks later before the final kick-off of the program.

The final teaching step was to develop a generic scenario using the democratic principles set forth in the *U.S. Bill of Rights* for incorporation into the practical planning exercises used in many classes at the Institute. The focus for students is on key constitutional rights, such as the rights of citizens to freedom of speech and press, peaceful assembly and redress of grievances, as the keystones of democratic institutions and constitutional freedoms that must be protected during military or police operations. Using the scenario, modified to meet the specific needs of each course, students are required to consider how best to protect these constitutional rights during actual operations. The integration of this material into the exercise forces the student to consider constitutional rights as a necessary part of operational planning. A brief outline of one possible scenario, developed for the counter-drug course but adaptable to other courses, is in the additional notes.⁶

At the end of each course, students are required to take an hour and fill out a seven-page evaluation of all aspects of the course. Among those aspects are questions on the three main parts of the Democracy and Human Rights Program, the Armed Forces and Democracy class, the Human Rights class and the Informational Program trip. Evaluations of more than 2,000 students over nearly three years have shown that students almost universally believe the Human Rights instruction they receive at the Institute will be useful in their professional careers. Evaluations of the Armed Forces and Democracy instruction, involving over students since the integration was implemented, are similarly positive. Responses on the Information Program trip part of the program are also very positive, except for the occasional student who is more concerned about how the logistics of the trip went than what he was supposed to be learning.

While it was a BOV recommendation specific to WHINSEC that spurred the Institute to expand and unify its previously disparate democracy, human rights and informational programs, many of the changes made and the lessons learned would seem applicable to other U.S. Army institutes that teach international students. The key lessons are: build from what already works both to save time and resources; explicitly link the teaching of democratic values with other appropriate instruction, whether it be human rights, field trips or practical exercises; make sure that the Information Program is fully integrated with classroom teaching and practical exercises to avoid the perception that it is somehow separate; provide constant reinforcement in all available venues of democratic values based on U.S. customs and traditions; and, above all, develop an integrated program. Tying the programs together also aids student understanding of how U.S. democratic institutions were formed and how they function today.

The key to the successful implementation of a Democracy and Human Rights Program, including the Informational Program, is the thorough integration of all aspects so that each part reinforces the others in achieving the overall objective of teaching fundamental democratic values. By becoming more effective and efficient, WHINSEC, or any other U.S. Army training institution, will go well beyond the minimum standards set by congressional legislation. It is this

⁶ Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation generic scenario for teaching constitutional values (see additional end note).

integration that enables WHINSEC to carry out the true spirit of its founding charge from Congress “to promote democratic values, respect for human rights, and knowledge and understanding of U.S. customs and traditions.”⁷

About the Author

Donald B. Harrington has an MA and a PhD in history from the University of Connecticut. After teaching at Waynesburg College in Pennsylvania, he entered the Foreign Service in 1976. He graduated from the National War College in Fort McNair, Washington D.C., in 1992. After retirement in 1999, he served on short assignments for the Department of State in Brasilia, Brazil, Nassau, The Bahamas and Georgetown, Guyana. He was named Dean of Academics and International Affairs at the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation in early July 2001.

⁷ 10 USC 2166.