
Command and Staff College

Distance Education Program (CSCDEP)

By

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What do you do when you can only send 20% of Marine Majors to a resident intermediate-level joint professional military education (JPME) and you can only support half the requirement for international military students in the Command and Staff College? Look for alternatives. Approximately 80% of Marines obtain their professional military education (PME) through some form of distance education. The Marine Corps has established regional seminars to allow these Majors to complete their education while they continue to do their “day jobs,” but they miss out on the international exposure and viewpoints.

The Marine Corps developed a new Command and Staff College Distance Education Program in order to accommodate the increased demand for international professional military education and to offer U.S. Marines another alternative to the resident Command and Staff College to fulfill their JPME requirement. The CSCDEP is more than just another distance education program. It offers a unique blended seminar construct built within the Marine Corps’ distance education program. This combined seminar approach offers the students a wider flavoring. The different points of view help the Marines understand how other country militaries think and operate, and likewise with the international students. This understanding is quite helpful in coalition partnerships.

This program, developed by the Marine Corps College of Continuing Education, is based on the intermediate-level Command and Staff College curriculum and includes two resident seminar periods. The first resident seminar period is 5-weeks set at the beginning of the program, and a 6-week resident seminar is at the end of the 1-year construct. In the middle of the program are three online seminars. The resident seminars are held in the brand new, state of the art classroom at the Security Cooperation Education and Training Center in Quantico, VA; and the online seminars include three courses of instruction using an interactive, internet-based Blackboard learning support system. Each individual course is designed to build the foundation leading to the next course of instruction. All course material is provided at the beginning of the resident sessions, so there is nothing to download from the internet and no “.mil” issues.

The diagram below provides an illustration of the course construct.

Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
8901 & 8902 5 Weeks Resident		8903 9 Weeks Online		8904 9 Weeks Online				8905 11 Weeks Online			8906, 8907 & 8908 6 Weeks Resident Graduation	

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8901 Theory and Nature of War • 8902 National and International Security Studies • 8903 Operational Art • 8904 Joint Warfighting | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8905 Small Wars • 8906 Marine Air-Ground Task Force (MAGTF) Expeditionary Operations • 8907 Amphibious Operations • 8908 Operations Planning |
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Instructor mentorship and student interaction throughout is key to the success of this program. The seminars provide a learner-centered course design with both online and face-to-face discussion as the primary learning methods; and both are faculty led, validating and evaluating the student's participation throughout.

The intent of the CSCDEP is to provide officers in the grade of O-4 with an understanding of the relationship among the strategic, operational, and tactical levels of war within a joint/multinational environment. In conjunction with the application of Marine Air-Ground Task Force (MAGTF) doctrine and techniques for the changing conditions of warfare, this understanding provides officers with the insights necessary to plan and conduct humanitarian and theater security cooperation operations, plan and participate in small wars operations, as well as plan and conduct conventional operations. The focus of the program is to develop officers who will apply the capabilities and potential roles of a MAGTF in a joint/multinational environment.



The pilot course was a marked success offering a diverse and holistic educational experience, engaging a mix of experiences and interpretations of the course material among the international and U.S. students. The class was balanced with an equal number of U.S. and international students, with the international students coming from Bahrain, Canada, New Zealand, Philippines, Slovakia, Sweden, and Saudi Arabia. The variety of military occupational specialties to include aviation, medical officer, air defense officer, logistics officer, artillery, infantry, and Light Armored Vehicles (LAV) officers offered an engaging mix of viewpoints, experiences, and interpretations of the course material. Additionally, the diversities in cultural sharing were tremendous and allowed everyone to benefit from differing perspectives.



Beginning with the first resident period of study, the students were introduced to U.S. military, U.S. history, the U.S. Marine Corps, human rights and ethics, an academic orientation, and the first two courses of the program. The online seminar included three courses of instruction using an interactive, internet-based Blackboard learning support system. The final resident period

concluded with the last three courses of the program, a final exercise, and then a graduation ceremony, alongside the resident Command and Staff College students.

Guest speakers offered their perspectives relative to the various courses. Retired Marine Commandant Alfred M. Gray spoke on the importance of continuing education and professional development for field grade officers. As Commandant, it was the General's dream to create a Marine Corps University that would provide professional military education and instill professional values in today's Marine Corps leaders. He also addressed his perspective on the Marine Corps focus on the importance of U.S. joint/coalition interoperability and implications in the Long War.

As part of the National and International Security Studies course, Ambassador Sam Zchem, former U.S. Senator and Ambassador to Bahrain, addressed his perspectives on what the current and future U.S. role should be in the Middle East and the importance of understanding differing cultures in strategic level decision-making.

Throughout the course, the students read selected works of history's greatest military theorists and generals and then discussed the comparison and contrast of their theories and practices. By applying these theories to selected eras and events in military history, students analyzed the evolution of warfare from the 17th century to the present and the nature of change in the characteristics of war in selected time frames. The students explored the concept of an "American way of war" and how it helped frame how Marines think about and conduct combat operations today.

The camaraderie and competition extended beyond the academic study and the ensuing discussions. The two resident periods included Field Studies Program events and other professional military education-type events. During the resident seminars, the students participated in several events outside the classroom. Kicking off the first seminar with a cook-out, they quickly got to know each other in a casual, informal setting. As part of their orientation to the Marine Corps, they visited the Officer Candidate School and The Basic School to tour the training areas and receive briefings on how future Marines are screened and



selected for commissions and then how they are trained after they are commissioned. They also visited the Weapons Training Battalion and observed a weapons demonstration.

As part of their Field Studies Program (FSP), they enjoyed visits to the District of Columbia, the Pentagon, Congress, and Arlington National Cemetery. They attended the Evening Parade at Marine Barracks 8th and I; the Mariners' Museum in Norfolk, VA; and the National Museum of the Marine Corps outside the main gate at Quantico. The National Museum of the Marine Corps was dedicated on 10 November 2006 and is a must see for all FSPs on the east coast. The students also organized a few of their own events such as a golf outing and a soccer match. On top of that, the international students were able to enjoy two of our best national holidays, Memorial Day and Independence Day!

Additionally, the students enjoyed a battlestaff ride to the U.S. Civil War battlefield at Chancellorsville as part of their Theory and Nature of War package. The study of the Chancellorsville battle establishes the prelude to events at Gettysburg and also addresses operational and strategic planning considerations and impact throughout the remainder of the Civil War. Theory and Nature of War introduced students to military theory and described its impact on the conduct of war. The Chancellorsville study allowed the students to discuss commandership; that is, how commanders behave and why they make the decisions they make. Each student picked a portion of the battle and led discussions looking at it from a commander's perspective.

After having established face-to-face relationships with the faculty and other students, the non-resident, online seminars proved to be just as successful and beneficial. During the non-resident portion, the students received their assignments and posted their work and received faculty and student feedback via the internet. Building onto what they learned during the resident seminar and establishing the foundation for the second resident seminar, the students studied the concept of operational (theater level) warfare and the relationship among the three levels of war: strategic, operational, and tactical; the organization of joint and combined forces, information operations, and cultural affect on operations; and the considerations associated with operational planning in a joint/multinational environment and war termination. The students analyzed strategic guidance provided by the President and Secretary of Defense and how to translate that guidance into operational direction in the form of a campaign plan designed to achieve military objectives.

The Joint Warfighting course focused on operational planning and the types of joint planning tools, forces, and specialized operations. The students gained an insight into the world of the combatant command, componentcy, joint planning systems and tools, joint operational capabilities, joint targeting, specialized joint operations, multinational operations, and the potential role in homeland security/defense in coordination with the interagency community.

The aspects of military operations that focus on deterring war and promoting peace and stability in an environment characterized by other than large-scale combat operations were examined during the Small Wars course. It offered a study in culture and ethics and focused on those very difficult aspects of stability and reconstruction operations. Insurgency and counterinsurgency were also key topics within the course. Small Wars considered how the U.S. becomes involved in entangling situations then must use all elements of national power to accomplish national goals and aspirations. This course provided a foundation on which to assess a situation, decide whether military response is appropriate, and justify the validity of that decision.

During the second resident seminar, the students continued to scrutinize the strategic, military, and cultural insight into the American Civil War during a battle study of Gettysburg. This Civil War battle reinforced concepts addressed in the Theory and Nature of War, Operational Art, MAGTF Expeditionary Operations, and Operation Planning courses. Students were provided an extensive study of both the strategic implications of the battle itself, the primary decisions made by the operational leadership within

both the Union and Confederate forces, and the impact that those decisions had on the battle and the remainder of the Civil War.

Visits to the Joint Forces Warfare Center, the Naval Station, and to the Little Creek Amphibious Base in the Norfolk area served to reinforce studies which they focused upon during their non-resident piece and also the MAGTF Expeditionary Operations and Amphibious Operations periods of instruction. The courses illustrated the emerging naval concepts which address Phase 0 through Phase 5 operations. The visits to Norfolk and Little Creek highlighted for the students the organizations responsible for joint and coalition interoperability, Theater Security Cooperation, and naval and expeditionary warfighting operations. The students visited and toured the newest amphibious ships (Landing Platform Dock, LPD-19), viewed the assets which provide transit ship/seabase to shore, and were introduced to naval organizations which support the Expeditionary Strike Groups (ESGs) and Marine Expeditionary Units (MEUs) and emerging naval concepts such as seabasing.

The Operational Planning course is the culminating course for the CSCDEP. Focusing on military operational planning using the Marine Corps Planning Process, Operational Planning offered the student the most current information on Marine Corps planning and real world planning lessons learned. The heart of this course, however, was the opportunity each student was given to develop planning products for an operations plan, based on a realistic operational scenario, using everything learned in the program. The practical exercise was imbedded throughout the course.

The graduation ceremony for this program is conducted in conjunction with the resident Command and Staff College graduation ceremonies. Each student from both the resident school and this program will have their diplomas presented by the distinguished guest, the Director of the college, and the President of the Marine Corps University.

The CSCDEP is offered to officers in the grade of Major (O-4). Officers in the grade of Captain (O-3) or Lieutenant Colonel (O-5) may apply for a grade requirement waiver. The English Competency Level (ECL) for students enrolling in the CSCDEP is 80SA.

A similar program is currently in development for the Expeditionary Warfare School curriculum and should be available in 2010.

About the Author

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