# Army Learning Concept 2015 is Under Way

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*Our enemies are always learning and adapting. They will not approach conflicts with conceptions or understanding similar to ours. And they will surprise us.*

—"The Joint Operating Environment 2010"

In December 2012, the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) published *The U.S. Army Capstone Concept*.[1] This concept describes a vision of future operating environments, the role of the Army in the joint force, and the broad capabilities required by future Army forces. The concept posits that our nation's adversaries will increase in number, perform military tasks more quickly, and possess significant military capabilities. These conditions will make operating environments more unpredictable and complex, leading to greater disorder. The concept also asserts that we must prepare our leaders to achieve proficiency in operational adaptability, which means we must educate them to understand their operating environments and adapt to them. How our educational institutions evolve to help create these adaptive leaders and thinkers is outlined in *The U.S. Army Learning Concept for 2015* (known as ALC 2015) [2]

ALC 2015 initiates an overhaul of how the U.S. Army approaches institutional learning. More important, while the capstone concept describes future conditions, the implementation of ALC 2015 is already under way, so that Army forces will be prepared for future operations. The U.S. Army Warrant Officer Career College (USAWOCC) has led the way in implementing ALC 2015 guidance on curriculum and teaching methodologies. Its focus on continuous improvement consistent with ALC 2015 led to TRADOC's naming USAWOCC a learning institution of excellence, June 2014.[3]

## A Model for Improving Army Education and Training

What sets our Army apart from our adversaries is the Army's ability to remain adaptive. Adaptiveness gives any force a competitive advantage. As ALC 2015 states, "The U.S. Army's competitive advantage directly relates to its capacity to learn faster and adapt more quickly than its adversaries."[4]

Published in June 2011, ALC 2015 lays the foundation of a campaign for driving change to Army education and training models. According to ALC 2015, "The current [as of 2011] Army individual learning model is inadequate" to meet the Army's challenges of outpacing our adversaries and fulfilling our responsibilities to the Nation.[5]

Legacy learning models lack innovation and tend to be bound by outmoded ways and technologies. Any courses that do not meet the needs of students or the Army, including traditional instructor-centric presentations based more on the academic calendar than on needed outcomes, are enemies of *adaptive learning*—defined by ALC 2015 as "a method that endeavors to transform the learner from a passive receptor of information to a collaborator in the educational process."[6]

ALC 2015 lists specific changes that learning organizations can implement immediately, to begin their

transitions. While these initial changes do not equal total transformation, they are a good start:

(1) Convert most classroom experiences into collaborative problem-solving events, led by facilitators (vice instructors) who engage learners to think and understand the relevance and context of what they learn.

(2) Tailor learning to the individual learner's experience and competence level based on the results of a pre-test or assessment.

(3) Dramatically reduce or eliminate instructor-led slide presentation lectures and begin using a blended learning approach that incorporates virtual and constructive simulations, gaming technology, or other technology-delivered instruction.[7]

In addition, ALC 2015's instructional guidelines state that all Army education and training programs should integrate skills for working with diverse cultures and joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational partners; incorporate comprehensive fitness goals into all courses; develop a flexible frame of mind in all learners that will encourage adaptability to meet operational demands; and use ALC's "21st Century Soldier Competencies" as an integral part of all learning outcomes.[8]

ALC 2015 lists the competencies as—

- Character and accountability
- Comprehensive fitness
- Adaptability and initiative
- Lifelong learner (includes digital literacy)
- Teamwork and collaboration
- Communication and engagement (oral, written, negotiation)
- Critical thinking and problem solving
- Cultural and joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational competence
- Tactical and technical competence (full-spectrum capable)[9]

We believe every class taught by U.S. Army instructors to every soldier should be linked directly to these critical competencies.

When classes are linked to the competencies, and proven methods of instruction are used, we feel certain the Army will be moving toward the desired end state.

## Warrant Officer Career College Learning Initiatives

USAWOCC has attacked the challenge head-on, implementing ALC 2015 guidance in 2011—soon after its publication. Consistent with the concept, the college has adopted David A. Kolb's experiential learning model.[10] It has restructured and retrained its faculty and implemented a curriculum that leads to outcomes ALC 2015 describes as "rigorous, relevant, and measurable."[11] USAWOCC trains and educates more than 3,800 students annually through its Warrant Officer Candidate Course (initial military training for warrant officer 1), Warrant Officer Intermediate Level Education (professional military education for chief warrant officer 4) and Warrant Officer Senior Service Education (professional military education for chief warrant officer 5).

USAWOCC now tailors learning to the individual learner's experience and competency level. The college is developing standardized learning outcomes for warrant officers, and it uses those outcomes together with senior-level education joint learning areas and objectives (joint professional military education phase I, outlined in Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Instruction [CJCSI] 1800.01) to tailor relevant, doctrine-based, and learner-centric outcomes that can be measured objectively.[12]

Strategy discussions in the professional military education classroom are based on the *National Security Strategy* and the *Quadrennial Defense Review*.[13] Students identify U.S. national interests in international conflicts. They address those interests through a synthesis of ends, ways, and means. Students examine issues of joint strategic leadership and communications and their places in history. They demonstrate understanding and application through oral and written assignments and practical exercises.

USAWOCC uses ALC 2015's 21st Century Soldier Competencies as an integral part of all learning outcomes. For example, the commandant of USAWOCC, Col. Garry L. Thompson, is a tireless proponent of comprehensive fitness and leader development. Moreover, he advocates directly to students the value of out-of-classroom learning experiences. To that end, USAWOCC has established pilot programs to reach students through various social media outlets. The programs have drawn positive reactions from current

and former students—who continue to engage the college via social media after graduation.

Initiatives to establish a collaborative virtual environment for students, instructors, and Army leadership have drawn positive attention from the Combined Arms Center, the Army Capabilities Integration Center, and the chief of staff of the Army. These efforts have prompted further in-house reflection on digital and communication strategies for the long term. The faculty and staff are determined to reach students where increasing numbers of them spend much of their time—online—and extend warrant officers' learning experiences beyond the brick-and-mortar environment.

Many students who participate in the new learning model laud capstone exercises in Warrant Officer Intermediate Level Education and Warrant Officer Senior Service Education for pushing them to think critically, cooperate with unified action partners, and fully consider cultural ramifications of key command decisions. Many students report they develop a better appreciation of commanders' requirements of staffs. In post-graduation surveys (internal, unpublished), students reflect how much better equipped they are to operate alongside staff officers who are graduates of other intermediate level education programs.

Within the classroom, USAWOCC has reduced or eliminated instructor-led slide presentations in favor of student-led briefs, student-executed practical exercises, and student-driven operational scenarios. Faculty have transitioned from "sage on the stage" to "guide on the side," challenging students with Socratic-style questioning techniques and gently steering student-initiated conversation and debate along paths that reach the desired learning outcomes, albeit through student initiative and conclusion.

Warrant officers have much to contribute to the learning of their fellow students. For example, those who possess rare or sought-after special skills have found themselves deployed somewhat disproportionately often compared to other soldiers over the last dozen years. Such have an inordinate wealth of operational experiences to share with their fellow students.

ALC 2015 laments, "The Army often assigns instructors arbitrarily, rather than through a selection process that accounts for subject matter expertise or aptitude, to facilitate adult learning. Instructor positions are not perceived to be career-enhancing assignments."[14] To meet that challenge, USAWOCC has been aggressively recruiting instructors with the best possible mix of operational and educational backgrounds. Moreover, in 2014, the one-hundred-percent selection rate of faculty

Warrant officer candidates complete a road march 28 July 2011 during Warrant Officer Candidate School at Camp Atterbury Joint Maneuver Training Center, Ind.

(Photo by Jill Swank, Camp Atterbury PAO)

members eligible for promotion to chief warrant officer 4 and chief warrant officer 5 sends encouraging signals that instructor duties, performed well, will be rewarded accordingly.[15] More important, the combination of instructionally and operationally astute educators with knowledgeable, combat-proven senior warrant officer students makes for a very stimulating learning environment.

USAWOCC has expanded its problem-solving events led by facilitators. The military history department conducts staff rides; the international strategic studies department leads operational environment studies; the joint, interagency, and multinational operations department leads students in military decision-making process activities; the communications and management systems department leads program management studies; and, the leadership and professional development department leads studies of senior leader ethical dilemmas.

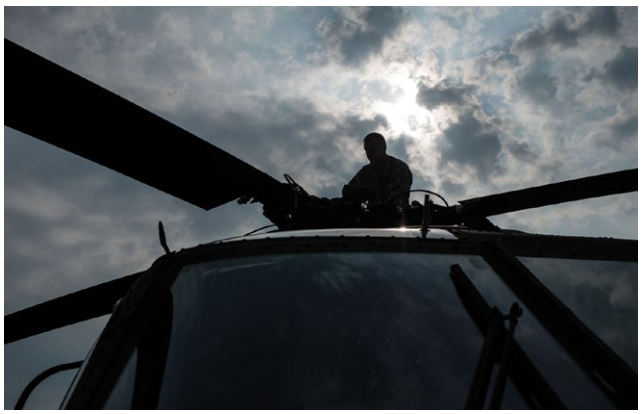
USAWOCC faculty are constantly creating opportunities for students to match their problem-solving wits against complex, realistic scenarios that require analysis, synthesis, and defense of methods—incorporating factors of mission analysis. Facilitators focus on what ALC 2015 describes as "operational adaptability through critical thinking;" developing a student appreciation of risk and a willingness to adjust to changing situations based on incoming information.[16]

Facilitators integrate joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational considerations as well as cultural factors and mission command into every department's curricula. In so doing, they develop in students a level of adaptability that enables them to meet the operational demands of their leadership and staff jobs.

## Transition to the Army Learning Concept 2015 throughout the Army

In general, ALC 2015 was designed to help the Army develop the adaptive thinkers it needs today and in the future. The methods of instruction it advocates are proven by academic research, and its initiatives can be considered common sense. In fact, implementation is underway not only at USAWOCC, but at Army learning institutions across the force.

Some delay in adopting these proven learning methods likely remains—in institutional settings and in the field. That said, if any Army institutions are not working toward aligning their content and delivery to ALC 2015 principles, they are behind the power curve. The 21st Century Soldier Competencies may not be common knowledge, or curriculum developers may not know how to integrate these competencies when developing expected learner outcomes. However, ALC 2015 reminds us, "The urgency to build a competitive Army learning model cannot wait until 2015. It must begin now."[17]



U.S. Army Reserve Chief Warrant Officer 2 Denver Gillham performs a preflight inspection 29 August 2013 on the main rotor of a UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter at Simmons Army Airfield, Fort Bragg, N.C.

(Photo by Timothy Hale, U.S. Army Reserve Command)

Therefore, we encourage all who administer Army education and training to examine their organizations and determine if they have improved their programs over the past few years. At a minimum, the leaders of these organizations should be providing professional development opportunities to their faculty so they can learn to apply effective learning models.

USAWOCC's transition to ALC 2015 is not yet complete. We continue to revise our curriculum, fine-tune our delivery methods, and train our new instructors. In fact, because the Army's instructor base comes from the operational force—made up of individuals trained or educated primarily on traditional learning models—we expect to be helping new instructors make the transition for several years. USAWOCC is building Army warrant officers who can think critically and help their commanders solve complex problems. Staying one step ahead of our adversaries, on the battlefield and in the classroom, will keep us all Army Strong.

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## Notes

***Epigraph.*** "The Joint Operating Environment 2010," quoted in TRADOC Pamphlet (TP) 525-8-2 (incorporating change 1), *The U.S. Army Learning Concept for 2015* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office [GPO], 6 June 2011), http://www.tradoc.army.mil/tpubs/pams/tp525-8-2_CH1.pdf.

1. TP 525-3-0, *The U.S. Army Capstone Concept* (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, 19 December 2012), http://www.tradoc.army.mil/tpubs/pams/tp525-3-0.pdf.
2. TP 525-8-2, 6.
3. A TRADOC Institution of Excellence rating is obtained by achieving a score of 95 percent or higher during a TRADOC accreditation visit.
4. TP 525-8-2, 6.
5. Ibid., 6.
6. Ibid., 62.
7. Ibid., 10.
8. Ibid., 26.
9. For more on the "21st Century Soldier Competencies," see TP 525-8-2.
10. David Kolb, *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1984).
11. TP 525-8-2, 7.
12. For joint professional military education phase I objectives, see Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Instruction (CJCSI) 1800.01D (incorporating change 1), *Officer Professional Military Education Policy (OPMEP)* (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, 5 September 2012), http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/education/officer_JPME/cjcsi1800_01d.pdf. Draft warrant officer learning objectives appear in *Army Learning Coordination Council, General Learning Outcomes for Warrant Officers,* draft v.2.0 (30 September 2013).
13. See *National Security Strategy* (Washington, D.C.: The White House, May 2010), http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/rss_viewer/national_security_strategy.pdf; and *Quadrennial Defense Review* (Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense, 2014), http://www.defense.gov/pubs/2014_Quadrennial_Defense_Review.pdf.
14. TP 525-8-2, 8.
15. The U.S. Army Human Resources Command announced 2014 selectees for promotion in July; see https://www.hrc.army.mil/.
16. TRADOC Pamphlet 525-8-2, 11.
17. Ibid., 9.

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