

Advanced Strategic Leadership Studies Program

Barry M. Stentiford

The Advanced Strategic Leadership Studies Program (ASLSP) is the War College-level program at the School of Advanced Military Studies (SAMS) on Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. SAMS is best known for its Advanced Military Studies Program (AMSP). In AMSP, up to nine seminars of twelve to sixteen students, mostly majors, undergo an intense eleven-month education on operational art. AMSP, however, is not synonymous with SAMS. SAMS actually has three programs: AMSP, the Advanced Strategic Planning and Policy Program (ASP3, also known as the Goodpaster Scholars Program), and ASLSP. ASLSP students are also known as the Marshall Strategic Leaders, in honor of one of the best strategic leaders of the U.S. Army.

The Program

ASLSP is an eleven-month senior service college (SSC) resident program that educates “future senior leaders of the Armed Forces, allies and the interagency for high-level policy, command, and staff responsibilities.”¹ Each new class begins at the end of June and graduates at the end of May. The program provides a rigorous graduate-level education, exposing students to, and preparing them for, the volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous dimensions of the joint, interagency, and multinational security environment. Students learn about strategy formulation, implementation, and campaigning in a dynamic global setting. The ASLSP curriculum provides a comprehensive, multifaceted education focused at the theater-strategic level across the spectrum of joint and service operations during peace, crisis, and

war. As a small program, ASLSP is able to quickly adapt its curriculum to meet the needs of the force.

History of ASLSP

ASLSP had its roots at the start of the SAMS concept under Brig. Gen. Huba Wass de Czege in the early 1980s. Wass de Czege had been one of the architects of AirLand Battle, the U.S. military’s basic concept of war for a generation. In 1984, with the first classes at SAMS, seven lieutenant colonels who had been selected to attend the U.S. Army War College were instead diverted to Fort Leavenworth. That group of seven formed the Advanced Operational Studies Fellowship (AOSF). Following the original concept of SAMS, this small group of lieutenant colonels spent a year at SAMS as students. While there, under the guidance of a handful of senior officers and civilian faculty, they were immersed into the curriculum of the main SAMS course—AMSP. The following year, those officers stayed to each lead a seminar in the AMSP course, teaching their students what they had learned the previous year. They then received credit for completing the SSC. Because such highly qualified officers could not remain on the faculty permanently, the program was designed to accept a new class of students each year into the Advanced Operational Studies Fellowship who would then serve as primary instructors for AMSP the following year.

In 1995, the name of the program was changed to the Advanced Operational Art Studies Fellowship (AOASF) to emphasize the “operational art” focus of SAMS. In the early twenty-first century, the

curriculum was more closely aligned to the strategic level of war, rather than toward operational art as it had previously been.² In 2013, the program was again modified in part to bring it more into alignment with U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command policies for SSC programs and to prepare it for Joint Professional Military Education II (JPME II) accreditation. It was at that time renamed the Advanced Strategic Leadership Studies Program. The name change was in part to avoid confusing it with the separate War College Fellowships in which SSC selectees attend classes at civilian universities. Despite almost a decade since the change, students are still sometimes erroneously referred to as “Fellows,” although most prefer to be called “Marshall Strategic Leaders.”



making up about half of each class. Other students normally come from Canada, Germany, and the United Kingdom. Military ASLSP students have typically

commanded a battalion-sized unit prior to their selection to attend ASLSP. Most classes also include one or two civilian students from the U.S. government. Such interagency students generally come from the State Department, the U.S. Agency for International Development, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and other agencies. The interagency students play an important role in keeping the class from becoming too focused on the military aspect of strategy. A top secret security

clearance is required for officers attending this course. Students are also required to have an official passport for use during field studies. While some ASLSP students previously attended SAMS as AMSP students, previous attendance at SAMS is not a requirement for admittance into ASLSP, and the majority of ASLSP students are at SAMS for their first time.

The Faculty

The faculty consists of a dedicated team of four civilian faculty members, all of whom hold PhDs and some of whom are also able to draw upon their own military experiences. One of the civilian faculty members also serves as the program’s director. (Currently, the author of this article fills this role.) The faculty also includes a military member, a graduate from the previous year’s class who demonstrated the skills needed to take on the vital role of educating the next class. The military faculty member, who remains on the faculty for one year, provides a vital link between the students and the civilian faculty, and is a key facilitator of ensuring the linkage between the course material and the needs of the force.

The faculty is dedicated to providing the best education possible to better equip graduates to serve at the strategic level. The faculty takes as a starting point the assumption that for most challenges at the strategic level, there is no “correct answer,” but that the students need an education that prepares them for dealing with the complexity and uncertainty of strategic issues.

The Students

An ASLSP class consists of one seminar of sixteen or seventeen students per year. Students come from all branches of the U.S. military, with U.S. Army students

The Courses

The ASLSP curriculum consists of the six courses: Strategy, Regional Studies, Joint Warfighting, Twenty-First-Century Conflict, Strategic Leadership, and Research and Writing. Students participate in a capstone integrated planning exercise (IPX) in which the products they generate are used by the AMSP students for their own capstone exercise. The six courses, along with the exercises, are structured to be complementary and provide a comprehensive education for students. At the end of the academic year, ASLSP students sit for a comprehensive oral examination, which serves as a final check on learning to ensure each student fully grappled with and mastered the program materials and have met the program learning objectives set by Army University.

The Strategy Course (F100) focuses on national security policy and strategic decision-making. The fourteen lessons provide deeper insights into the complexity of national security policy making and strategy formulation. The course forces students to grapple with questions such as: What is policy and how it is formulated? What is strategy? How is strategy formulated in

our system of government? What are some of the formal and informal structures in the government involved in making national security policy and strategy? How are some of these systems codified in the U.S. government? In the Strategy Course, the students study a series of lessons that present a theoretical construct for evaluating strategy and policy, and they assess historical examples of policy making. The course helps to develop the habits of mind and intellectual background the students will need when they assume their responsibilities as senior leaders and staff officers in high-level policy organizations. The Strategy Course includes a week of fieldwork in the National Capital Region and another to several combatant commands within the continental United States.

The Regional Studies Course (F200) consists of two eight-week subcourses, Europe-Africa and Asia-Pacific. The course provides a framework with which to analyze how factors such as history, geography, religion, politics, economics, and culture shape national policies, strategies, and campaigns. At the conclusion of each subcourse, the students conduct fieldwork within the region and visit the U.S. combatant command headquarters responsible for those regions. F200 includes an exercise focused on NATO policy as well as a strategic planning practicum in which students respond to a complex and dangerous strategic issue.

Joint Warfighting Course (F300) is a sixteen-lesson course designed to evaluate the principles of joint operations, joint military doctrine, and joint functions. It explores how theater strategies, campaigns, and major operations achieve national strategic goals. Normally, the military faculty member takes the lead in this course. The initial part of the course addresses the Department

of Defense, interagency, and intergovernmental structures and processes in forming national security policy and strategy. The second portion of the course analyzes the components of operational planning and design, and includes visits to U.S. Strategic Command and U.S. Transportation Command.

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The Twenty-First Century Conflict Course (F400) is designed to help the students better understand the changing nature of warfare, the military's role in adapting to these changes, and how to best prepare for an uncertain future, all of which is encapsulated in former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Martin Dempsey's call to develop "agile and adaptive leaders with the requisite values, strategic vision, and thinking skills to keep pace with the changing strategic environment."³ To that end, F400 is a sixteen-lesson course that first examines the types of wars and modes of warfare existent in the post-Cold War world, explores what the U.S. response to these has typically been, and then delves into critical facets of what comprises modern and/or future war, including varying power structures, hybrid warfare, social revolutions, civil wars, armed groups, information operations, cyberwarfare, and space operations. As part of the course, students also look at the moral and ethical ramifications of operating in these environments to better understand the value and limitations of applying force. The course concludes with lessons on how to build scenarios to develop better forecasts for the future, and hopefully successful, employment of military force to achieve the Nation's political and strategic aims.

The Strategic Leadership Course (F500) gets to the higher goals of the program—to expose the students to more complex issues of leadership at the strategic level. The course defines strategic leadership in terms of the military's role in national security issues. The course examines the competencies required to succeed in senior positions in today's environment. This sixteen-lesson course assumes students have already succeeded as leaders at the operational and tactical levels but seeks to prepare them for the challenges they will face at the strategic level by providing them with the competencies and awareness needed by senior leaders. The course challenges students to expand their critical analysis and creative thinking skills, improve their communication skills, and expand their capacity for executive decision-making. The course also includes lessons on accepting responsibility and accountability, the nature of command, moral values, and an awareness of the strategic environment. The objective of the course is to prepare students to lead and serve in a joint environment at the strategic level.

Finally, the Research and Writing Course (E700) is one of the backbones of a SAMS education. Like



AMSP students, ASLSP students are required to research and write over the course of the program a monograph of approximately twelve thousand words that meets the standards of graduate-level research and demonstrates competent writing skills. While AMSP monographs are aimed at the operational level, students in ASLSP are required to complete theirs on a topic at the strategic level. Students are given a list of suggested topics that the school compiles from requests for studies that come from myriad sources throughout the Department of Defense. However, students are given broad latitude in selecting their topic. All topics are chosen in consultation with one of the faculty members as a suitable and viable topic. The faculty ensure that the topic is feasible and is one that the students will both learn from and be interested in. Each monograph is written under the guidance of one of the faculty members. Completed monographs are to be of publishable quality and provide value to later researchers on the topic. As with AMSP monographs, all ASLSP monographs are made public through the Ike Skelton Combined Arms Research Library website.⁴

Col. Kirk Dorr, then director of the School of Advanced Military Studies (SAMS), addresses students and guests 23 May 2019 at the SAMS Class of 2019 graduation ceremony on Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. The Advanced Strategic Leadership Studies Program is the War College-level program at SAMS. (Photo courtesy of ArmyU Public Affairs)

Field Studies

One of the main draws for the program is its extensive field studies program. ASLSP students participate in several field studies as part of their education. The field studies are designed to reinforce and expand classroom studies and allow students to meet with senior leaders across joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational organizations. Students also engage with nongovernmental agencies to gain a varied perspective on strategic issues. In most years, students spend approximately seven weeks away from Fort Leavenworth conducting field studies.

The field studies program includes a weeklong series of engagements in the National Capital Region centered on Washington, D.C. While there, students engage with leaders from the U.S. military, Congress,



and governmental agencies such as the Agency for International Development, the U.S. Department of the Treasury, and the Central Intelligence Agency. Additionally, students have had engagements with non-governmental entities such as the World Bank and major defense contractors. The National Capital Region field study is part of the Strategy Course, although lessons from the Joint Warfighting Course and the Strategic Leadership Course are also reinforced during the field study.

Students participate in a two-week field study to Europe as part of the Regional Studies Course. Students go to Brussels, Belgium, for meetings with the U.S. Embassy, NATO, the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe, and the European Union. If the schedule permits, other engagements and activities are included. After Brussels, the students normally go to Stuttgart, Germany, where they spend a day each with U.S. European Command and U.S. Africa Command. From Stuttgart, students travel to several other countries to interact with their militaries and governments and get a better understanding of the strategic issues those countries face. In the past, students have gone to

Advanced Strategic Leadership Studies Program students and faculty and Daniel K. Inouye Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies faculty discuss the relationship between China and Vietnam during an Asia-Pacific field study in February 2019 on Fort DeRussy, Hawaii, in preparation for the follow-on visit to the People's Republic of Vietnam. (Photo by author)

Canada, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Poland, Sweden, and the United Kingdom, among others.

Like the European field study, the Pacific field study complements the classroom studies and readings of the Regional Studies Course. Central to any Pacific field study is a visit to the Hawaiian island of Oahu. There, the students engage with U.S. Indo-Pacific Command. Afterward, the students have follow-on engagements with the Pacific Air Force, the Pacific Fleet, and U.S. Army Pacific. Given the proximity of these activities to each other, students can see up close the linkage between the combatant command and the force providers. While on Oahu, students also visit the Daniel K. Inouye Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies and the East-West Center at the University of Hawai'i. Students follow

their week in Hawaii with an in-depth visit to one of the nations in the Pacific region. In the past, students have gone to Australia, India, Korea, the Philippines, Taiwan, and Vietnam. In all such field studies, students engage with government, military, and nongovernmental agen-

Benefits of Attending ASLSP

All ASLSP graduates earn a Master of Arts in Strategic Studies degree and are considered complete for their professional military education SSC requirement (MEL I). U.S. military students since 2016 have also been



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cies to complement their classroom readings and discussions with real-world interactions that better equip them to deal with international relations. Always unstated but very real is the responsibility of the program to maintain good relations with the host nations and build the personal connections between Army University and other nations and regions.

Students participate in two short field studies of global significance. The relative proximity of Offutt Air Force Base in Nebraska and Scott Air Force Base in southern Illinois gives ASLSP students the opportunity to make overnight stays to spend a day each at U.S. Strategic Command and U.S. Transportation Command. Both of these global combatant commands have been gracious hosts, giving students access to high-level leaders. At Scott Air Force Base, students usually take advantage of the colocation of the U.S. Air Force's Air Mobility Command to conduct engagements with that important component of the U.S. Transportation Command. These field studies form part of the Joint Warfighting curriculum, though as with all field studies, learning areas from other courses are reinforced.

For one week, students travel within the continental United States to visit the more distant combatant commands as part of the Strategy Course. During that week, students engage with U.S. Northern Command in Colorado; and U.S. Southern Command, U.S. Central Command, and U.S. Special Operations Command in Florida. Depending on the year, students have also spent time at U.S. Army Forces Command and other key elements of the military component of the whole-of-government resources available to strategic leaders.

awarded their Joint Professional Military Education II (JPME II) accreditation.⁵ Additionally, U.S. Army students are awarded the SAMS additional skill identifier 6-S. After graduation, a majority of the students will remain at SAMS for their follow-on year, with up to nine serving as seminar leaders for the next year's AMSP class while another graduate joins the ASLSP faculty. U.S. officers incur a two-year active-duty service obligation.⁶ Graduates typically later serve in a brigade-level command assignment or work for a three- or four-star general officer as a member of his or her staff.

Preparation for Follow-on as a Seminar Leader

Along with the field studies program, the other main draw for ASLSP is the opportunity to serve as a seminar leader in the AMSP the follow-on year. While not all students will be granted this opportunity, many graduates say they came to ASLSP specifically to work with and shape the next generation of military leaders. Selection of future seminar leaders and the military faculty member for ASLSP normally is normally announced in the late winter. Preparation for a potential follow-on assignment as a seminar leader for those eligible begins shortly after the start of the new year. Preparation consists of a series of classes and engagements with current seminar leaders and the SAMS leadership on various aspect of the duties. Additionally, where possible, the readings, topics, and exercises in ASLSP overlap with the AMSP curriculum, though in lessons focused at the strategic level. This overlap gives the ASLSP graduates a depth of understanding when they are leading classes in AMSP focused on

operations. ASLSP students are encouraged to associate with one of the current AMSP seminar leaders and spend some time observing their classes, as well as attending the Post Instruction Conferences (mini-PICs) held at the conclusion of each course. The ASLSP faculty, especially the director, work closely with the student selected to serve as the military faculty member the following year to ensure he or she is prepared to assume that role. Future seminar leaders and the military faculty member also attend Army University's Faculty Development Program after their graduation to bring them into alignment with the university's standards.

Attending senior service college at the ASLSP at SAMS has often been one of the most rewarding professional military education experiences in the careers of many officers. Its small size, extensive field studies program, and potential to serve as a seminar leader for AMSP the following year attract a highly qualified group of students each year.

Officers interested in attending their senior service college at SAMS should contact the SAMS office at DSN 585-3302 or commercial 913-758-3302, or the ASLSP director, Dr. Barry M. Stentiford, at 913-758-3289 or email at barry.m.stentiford.civ@army.mil. ■

Notes

1. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Instruction (CJCSI) 1800.01F, *Officer Professional Military Education Policy* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 15 May 2020), A-B-8, accessed 12 October 2021, https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/education/cjcsi_1800_01f.pdf?ver=2020-05-15-102430-580.

2. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Memorandum CM-0166-13, "Desired Leader Attributes for Joint Force 2020" (Washington, DC: Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 28 June 2013).

3. "Ike Skelton Combined Arms Research Library," U.S. Army Combined Arms Center, last reviewed 3 February 2021, accessed 12 October 2021, <https://usacac.army.mil/organizations/cace/carl>.

4. Kevin Benson, *School of Advanced Military Studies Commemorative History: 1984–2009* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 2009).

5. Advanced Strategic Leadership Studies Program learning objectives align with the joint professional military education requirements under 10 U.S.C. § 2151 (2011).

6. Ibid.; Army Regulation 350-100, *Officer Active Duty Service Obligations* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Publishing Office, 26 September 2017), accessed 3 September 2021, https://armypubs.army.mil/ProductMaps/PubForm/Details.aspx?PUB_ID=1001739.

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