# The Learning Enterprise Assistance Program

## Customer Service at the Point of Need

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## Abstract

Army University (ArmyU) was established 7 July 2015. One of the organization's roles is to identify and promulgate innovative best practices throughout the Army's learning enterprise. The Directorate of Academic Affairs established the Learning Enterprise Assistance Program (LEAP) as a lessons learned initiative and a true customer-driven process to support the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command centers of excellence and branch schools. LEAP presents workshops selected by the customer in several education-related areas during staff assistance visits. An overview of the program's background, a description of the planning process, and the results of the first year's execution are presented. LEAP has proven to be a resource-intensive initiative that must demonstrate its value to the learning enterprise to be viable in the future. Proposed methods for evaluating the program's effectiveness, customer satisfaction, and blended learning approaches are examined as potential methods for increasing the effective delivery of workshops requiring fewer resources.

## Introduction

Army University (ArmyU), established 7 July 2015, is both a symbolic and a substantive enterprise-level change in Army learning. Creating ArmyU demonstrated the Army's commitment to improving the education system and fostering innovation (Brown, 2015, p. 24). The ArmyU Directorate of Academic Affairs (formerly the vice provost of academic affairs) has primary responsibility for identifying and promulgating innovative best practices throughout the Army's learning enterprise.

ArmyU established the Learning Enterprise Assistance Program (LEAP) as a service to the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) centers of excellence and branch schools. Program participation is voluntary, at no cost to the centers of excellence or schools. The LEAP staff assistance visits are tailored based upon organizational self-assessments to cover areas they identify for improvement: a real customer-driven process. LEAP services include a growing menu of workshops. Workshops range from two to eight hours in areas identified for improvement based upon enterprise-wide lessons learned. LEAP was officially launched during the fourth quarter of fiscal year (FY) 2018 with five staff assistance visits performed. FY 2019 has at least 11 additional staff assistance visits programmed. Expected program growth may require multiple forms of workshop delivery to support all of the customers.

## Background

The Center for Teaching and Learning Excellence was established within the Directorate of Academic Affairs in part to assess current practices and adopt or integrate new learning practices supporting faculty development (Faculty and Staff Development Division), curriculum development (Instructional Design Division), and advances in the learning sciences (Institutional Research and Assessment Division). Leonard Lira and Keith Beurskens's article in the October 2017 *Journal of Military Learning* titled "An Engine for Army Learning: Army University's Center for Teaching and Learning Excellence" provides a detailed review of the Center for Teaching and Learning Excellence and its subordinate division's functions (Lira & Beurskens, 2017). The Directorate of Academic Affairs also includes the accreditation and programs section responsible for the Continuing Education Degree Program, the Credentialing Program, and the American Council on Education, which reviews TRADOC courses for recommended college credit.

The LEAP conceptual beginnings were in response to the challenge of promulgating lessons learned from an evaluation of the American Council on Education credit review program effectiveness. The Accreditation and Programs Section determined there were two critical areas needing improvement: (1) lesson alignment of learning outcomes to assessments and (2) the American Council on Education's presentation of instruction programs. The early successes supporting schools undergoing American Council on Education reviews lead to expansion of the LEAP.

The first LEAP working group met in mid-February 2018. It consisted of members of the Accreditation and Programs Section, the Instructional Design Division, the Faculty and Staff Development Division, the Institutional Research and Assessment Division, and the Policy and Governance Division from the Directorate of Learning Systems. The purpose of the first working group was to establish quar-

**Table**
Learning Enterprise Assistance Program (LEAP) Workshops

| Workshop | Workshop length | Information |
|---|---|---|
| **Assessment and rubric development** | 8 hours | The workshop includes how to develop assessment questions (multiple choice, true/false, fill-in-the-blank, and essay) at appropriate learning levels to align with the curriculum being taught. The workshop also includes rubric development and calibration techniques. Target audience is approximately 15-20 training developers/instructors. |
| **Preparation for an American Council on Education (ACE) visit** | 2 hours | The workshop assists schools and centers to prepare for an ACE review. The information presented includes a how-to in-brief, curriculum learning level alignment, assessment alignment, and who needs to be at an ACE review. Target audience is approximately 10 people involved in the ACE process. |
| **Data collection and implementation of feedback** | 2 hours | The workshop provides assistance with creation of evaluations—course, instructor, curriculum, etc.—as well as the planning, implementation, and analysis of evaluations. We provide guidance, tools, and techniques to help schools establish an internal feedback system to adapt to changing demands of students. Target audience is approximately 15-20 people interested in gaining feedback on their products and services. |
| **General learning outcomes (GLO) alignment** | 2 hours | Workshop provides techniques to align course outcomes with GLO and methods to review alignment during the accountable instruction process (Accountable Instruction System [AIS]) (Post Instructional Conference/Course Design Review [PIC/CDR]). Target audience is approximately 10 course managers and curriculum developer supervisors. |
| **The Developers Workshop**<br>**AM session:**<br>Terminal Learning Objective-Enabling Learning Objective (TLO-ELO) Alignment<br>**PM session:**<br>Assessment Development | 6 hours | This is a one-day workshop designed to refresh curriculum developers on the analysis, design, development, implementation, and evaluation (ADDIE) process and to correctly identify TLOs. The workshop focuses on a TLO-ELO construct by emphasizing the "design" phase with focus on the learning objective and constructing a proper assessment for the lesson. Target audience is approximately 10 course managers and curriculum developer supervisors. |

Table by Jayson B. Dodge

terly goals to achieve the end state of the program—a plan to reach full operational capability starting in FY 2019.

Some of the significant objectives included establishing a "menu" of workshops, developing internal LEAP standard operating procedures, creating products to inform the enterprise of the program, designing various surveys, and coordinating future LEAP visits. After the initial working group, the LEAP team met regularly at bimonthly intervals.

A key product of the working group was the initial menu of workshops to fill gaps identified from the ArmyU initial gap analysis, as shown in the table, "LEAP Workshops." As the program grows and we work with the centers of excellence and schools, we realize LEAP must be agile and adaptive to address the needs of our

customers. LEAP plans to expand to include other ArmyU directorates and develop additional workshops to offer customers.

## Program Description

The LEAP program is designed to take a service culture approach and is entirely customer oriented. The program is completely nonattributional. There is no effort to do fact finding or reporting to ArmyU headquarters. Trends or results are shared only with the center of excellence or school leadership. The program is wholly based on the needs of the center of excellence or school, with no mandatory workshops included as part of the LEAP visit.

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LEAP has three phases: pre-LEAP planning, LEAP staff assistance visit, and post-LEAP evaluation.

**Pre-LEAP planning phase.** The center of excellence or school initiates the pre-LEAP planning phase through contact with the ArmyU LEAP program manager. There are three key activities in this phase.

First, the LEAP visit is scheduled to accommodate the center of excellence or school. The LEAP coordinator supports the customer's scheduling request while optimizing service to other LEAP customers and executing ArmyU's other missions. The program manager also strives to have a minimum of two weeks between LEAP staff assistance visits. This time is critical to consider immediate feedback that could lead to workshop improvements, solicit the formal postvisit survey responses, and prepare for the next LEAP visit.

The second key event is a customer self-assessment and gap analysis, which aids the customer in selecting the appropriate workshops. The center of excellence or school may choose to conduct an informal self-assessment, or it may take advantage of a pre-LEAP survey developed to assist the customer in determining areas they may want to focus on during the LEAP visit. The survey assists participants with assessment of interest in various topics rooted in the current LEAP workshops. Research psychologists from the Institutional Research and Assessment Division analyze survey data and return the results, which are confidential, to the customer.

The third activity includes coordinating in progress reviews one month and again two weeks prior to the visit, finalizing desired workshops, and confirming student loads. The purpose of the in progress review is to verify link up time and location, workshop schedule, the number of participants per workshop, and reservations for required facilities.

**LEAP staff assistance visit.** The second LEAP phase begins the day before execution when the LEAP visit team links up with the center of excellence or school point of contact. Meeting the day prior allows the team to meet the customer point of contact, discuss any last minute changes to the schedule, reconnoiter classrooms, and download their workshop materials onto the computers used for their workshops. The LEAP team has a clear understanding that conditions may change on the ground, and they must remain responsive to the customer by being agile and adaptive to schedule changes. A second "smile-sheet" LEAP survey follows each workshop to measure participants' immediate reaction to the content and facilitator performance. This feedback is a critical tool for two reasons. First, it allows ArmyU to measure customer feedback on the facilitator's performance. Second, it enables ArmyU to determine whether the needs of the participants are met. Each day ends with a rapid after action review by the LEAP team. This phase ends with a formal after action review cofacilitated by ArmyU and center of excellence or school facilitators.

**Post-LEAP evaluation.** The final, post-LEAP phase commences upon the team's return to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and consists of three main actions. The first action is to produce a combined trip report. The report provides an overall description of the

staff assistance visit including LEAP team members, dates, and location of the visit and a short overall assessment of the climate of the visit. The report also lists the workshops provided, facilitators of the workshops, number of participants per workshop and, if necessary, the number of iterations of workshop. The last portion of the report includes observations and recommendations captured by the LEAP team during the daily after action reviews. The completed report is distributed to LEAP members and to the customer. Next is an internal ArmyU after action review to focus on improvements to the planning and execution of future LEAP visits. The final action is a follow-up phone interview with the center of excellence or school point of contact approximately eight weeks after the LEAP visit. The purpose is to solicit the customer's assessment of the effectiveness of the workshops and to allow for scheduling LEAP follow-up visits if desired. This information is also valuable for assessing the overall satisfaction of our customer and to facilitate modification of the program if warranted.

## Initial Program Results

The first official LEAP visit was in November 2017. The initial visit consisted of one day of training with an overview of the general learning outcomes from Army Field Manual 3-0, *Operations*, and creation of multiple-choice assessments at all levels of Bloom's Taxonomy, a hierarchal framework of higher learning and education used to organize levels of expertise necessary to a reach an objective. Lessons learned were captured for program improvement. The program needed to expand the workshops offered to meet the needs identified by the customers from their gap analysis. The assessment workshop required a redesign to add rubric creation and create a full-day workshop dedicated solely to assessment design and development. The restructured full-day assessment workshop premiered in May 2018. A second workshop in May 2018 included a two-day revised assessment creation workshop and a new workshop on how to prepare for an American Council on Education review. Feedback from participants was very positive; it included comments on their new understanding of the criticality of assessments to success during an American Council on Education review and how the information would be applied. In August 2018, based upon customer requests, the number of workshops expanded to include Alignment of Terminal Learning Objectives and Enabling Learning Objectives, and Data Collection and Implementation of Feedback. The new workshops were well received, although the customers felt too many workshops occurred simultaneously for attendees to participate in all of them.

Initially, the program was advertised to specific centers of excellence and schools by ArmyU through word of mouth. Formal promotion of the program began through a partnership with the Policy and Guidance Division within ArmyU's Directorate of Learning Systems, which conducts mandatory workload management site assistance

visits each year to the centers of excellence and schools. The Directorate of Academic Affairs offered LEAP services as an add-on to the Policy and Guidance Division's visit. Several schools and centers opted for the addition of a LEAP to the workload management visit (U.S. Department of the Army [DA], 2018a). The second program advertisement was the publication of a TRADOC task order. The purpose of the task order was to inform the learning enterprise of LEAP and various workshops available and to solicit requests for a LEAP visit in FY 2019. The response rate to the task order was low, yielding only a few requests for assistance (DA, 2018b).

Word of mouth advertisement by ArmyU and recent LEAP customers generates much greater program interest. ArmyU also promotes the program in Army Learning Coordination Council subcommittee meetings—in particular, the Policy and Governance Oversite Committee—that serves as a discussion and decision forum with participants from across the Army learning enterprise.

The promotion of the initial LEAP, especially through word of mouth, contributed to increases in the number and availability of workshop offerings. Centers of excellence and schools have requested at least 11 additional visits for FY 2019. Two of the FY 2019 LEAP visits are scheduled to support non-TRADOC schools. Planning is underway to include "how-to guides," available online to support the workshops and expanding the work shop offerings in coordination with the Directorate of Distance Learning and the Army University Press.

## Program Evaluation

LEAP must be a cost- and performance-effective program with benefits worth the investment. The program requires a significant investment of employee work hours and transportation costs for the LEAP team, as well as employee work hours of the students in the workshops. A customer-service approach is the most promising method to determine its value. Providing customer service within the military from a higher headquarters to a subordinate organization is a rare approach. The prevalent relationship is one of "mission command," which is the balancing of "the *art of command* as the creative and skillful exercise of authority through timely decision-making and leadership" (DA, 2012, p. 5) and "the s*cience of control* consists of systems and procedures used to improve the commander's understanding and support accomplishing missions" (DA, 2012, p. 8). A keyword search for "customer service" and "military" across several peer-reviewed sources in popular search databases (e.g., ABI/INFORM, Academic Search Complete, and ProQuest) did not yield any that included this unique relationship.

Managing the quality of the customer service relationship does not happen by accident! Service quality is managed similar to how other organizational processes are managed: planning, delivering, evaluating, and improving the service experience. Ser-

vice quality was defined by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988) as the ability to meet or exceed customer expectations. Customers pursue services that solve their problems and expect the service to be *right* the first time. Service quality is also more than providing a functional service. Mechanic and humanic clues appeal to the customer's affective domain; they are emotional judgments of how the service encounters *feel* to the customer (Berry, Wall, & Carbone, 2006, p. 48).

The humanic dimension "offers the chance to cultivate emotional connectivity that can extend respect and esteem to customers and, in so doing, exceed their expectations, strengthen their trust, and deepen their loyalty" (Berry, Wall, & Carbone, 2006, p. 49). Humanic elements allow the organization to exceed expectations through a direct focus on "the customer" by evoking pleasant surprise. Emotional connection increases through personal and continuing customer-service provider relationships. Jan Carlzon's (1987) *Moments of Truth: New Strategies for Today's Customer Driven Economy* introduced the concept of "moments of truth" in dealing with customers capturing the essence of the humanic dimension. Moments of truth are experienced by the customer every time a member of the service provider's organization interacts with them—email, telephone, video-teleconference, face-to-face, rumor, etc. *Every* customer interaction is both an opportunity and a threat to service quality.

Measures of customer service within LEAP are in two areas: (1) the learning of the individual student (i.e., accurately and satisfactorily) and (2) the effectiveness of meeting the hosting center of excellence or school goals (i.e., dependability and value). Service satisfaction reflects the customer's post-experience summary evaluation of the service. Satisfaction may be subcategorized as relative (i.e., what is delivered) or overall (i.e., how it is delivered) satisfaction. Customer value is the assessment of the usefulness of the service relative to the cost (Sivadas & Jindal, 2017). Initially, LEAP used a "relative service" 10-item post-workshop survey and overall service comment cards. ArmyU is exploring empirically validated methods for future measurement of services.

ArmyU reviewed several customer service quality and performance tools applied in the past within the higher education context. The use of customer service practices within higher education organizations increases as students become viewed as customers, organizations face increased competition with other institutions, public funding decreases, and educational costs to students and their families rise (Celuch & Robinson, 2016; Chalcraft, Hilton, & Hughes, 2015; Teeroovengadum, Kamalanabhan, & Seebaluck, 2016). Service quality and performance tools may drive modifying the current LEAP survey and help demonstrate the value of the program. The most promising tools considered are the Higher Education Performance (HEdPERF) for individual learner satisfaction and word-of-mouth referral for organizational satisfaction.

Service Quality (SERVQUAL) and Service Performance (SERVPERF) general service measurement tools require modification for specific applications. SERVQUAL has been in use since the 1980s as a simple method of measuring the difference be-

tween a customer's perceptions and expectations of the service received. SERVQUAL measures service and expectations based upon 22 items from each perspective across five dimensions: reliability, responsiveness, assurance, tangibles, and empathy. Performance is subtracted from expectations to derive quality gaps, grouped into seven areas (Adil, Mohammad Al Ghaswyneh, & Musallam Albkour, 2013). Criticism of the tool includes the potential for misinterpretation of the "difference scores" used to calculate the quality gaps, as well as theoretical and operational criticism of its dimensional structure (Galeeva, 2016, p. 329).

SERVPERF uses the SERVQUAL 22 items across the same five dimensions for measuring the performance of services delivered and compares the ratings to ideal features—it does not include expectations (Adil, Mohammad Al Ghaswyneh, & Musallam Albkour, 2013; Galeeva, 2016; Mahmoud & Khalifa, 2015). SERVPERF has been found to be a better measure of service in general than SERVQUAL (Adil, Mohammad Al Ghaswyneh, & Musallam Albkour, 2013, p. 70).

Higher education also uses modified versions of SERVQUAL and SERVPERF. There is some evidence SERVPERF and HEdPERF outperform SERVQUAL within higher education (Adil, Mohammad Al Ghaswyneh, & Musallam Albkour, 2013; Galeeva, 2016). Additionally, Ganić, Babić-Hodović, and Arslanagić-Kalajdžić (2018) researched the dimensions of satisfaction and loyalty to the SERVPERF and found a direct, positive, and significant relationship satisfaction, whereas loyalty had no significant relationships.

The HEdPERF service measurement instrument was developed specifically for higher education. The tool consists of 41 items and six dimensions: nonacademic aspects, academic aspects, reputation, access, program issues, and understanding. It also has high reliability and criterion-related validity; discriminate validity is not demonstrated (Abdullah, 2005; Abdullah, 2006a).

Modified five-dimension HEdPERF (e.g., understanding dimension dropped) comparisons to SERVPERF and a HEdPERF-SERRVPERF integrated tool demonstrated HEdPERF as superior to the other two instruments for unidimensionality, reliability, validity, and explained variance (Abdullah, 2006b). Several researches validated or partially validated the early work with HEdPERF, determining it outperforms SERVQUAL and SERVPERF in the higher education context, and the access dimension (Abdullah, 2006a; Abdullah, 2006b; Silva, Moraes, Makiya, & Cesar, 2017).

Word of Mouth (WOM) is another proposed measure for overall satisfaction (Sivadas & Jindal, 2017). WOM is considered a substitute for attitudinal loyalty resulting from tremendously satisfied customers. Loyalty in this context represents the customer's intent to once again use this service over other options (Tripathi, 2018). In the age of public social media, there has been an exponential growth in the use of WOM (Pruden & Vavra, 2015). Antecedents to customers making WOM recommendations include a positive or negative message of content, motivation, and opportunity to share the attitude. WOM is considered an

extremely high level of satisfaction because it means customers are making unsolicited recommendations for a service or product (Pruden & Vavra, 2015). WOM recommendations also exhibit a halo effect that moderates the negative attitudes that arise from one bad experience (Shi, Tang, Zhang, Gao, & Zhu, 2016). The goal for LEAP is to expand across all centers and schools based upon the perceived value of the program, as measured by WOM.

## Program Future

LEAP is gaining in popularity and demand, which is in turn leading to an expansion of the program's workshop offerings. Schools are already requesting multiple same-year visits and spreading out visits to ensure a larger portion of their workforce can benefit from each workshop. Our customers have also shown interest in a workshop reach-back refresher capability. LEAP is expected to outgrow the ArmyU capability and funding required to provide all services in only on-site, face-to-face settings by FY 2020. In a time of budget constraints, a blended learning solution solves both these challenges.

Blended learning is a design approach that may leverage a mix of technologies, pedagogical approaches, and instructional technology with face-to-face instruction (Bliuc, Goodyear, Ellis, 2007). As Yu Zhonggen and Zhejiang Yuexiu (2015) noted in "Blended Learning over Two Decades," blended learning can take many different forms: "The technology aided activities attempted to improve learning effectiveness through integration of active learning approaches and/or extensive use of working experience" (p. 6). The literature is mixed in findings of the blended learning advantages and disadvantages compared to face-to-face and completely online courses (Bliuc, Goodyear, Ellis, 2007, p. 233; Chen & Jones, 2007; Means, Toyama, Murphy, & Baki, 2013). Advantages of blended learning may include effective and flexible delivery, convenient learner access, and increased efficiency compared to traditional resident instruction (De George-Walker & Keeffe, 2010). A primary concern of transitioning to blended learning course design is the potential of not fully achieving desired learning outcomes, lower learner satisfaction, and lower development of classroom community (Bliuc, Goodyear, Ellis, 2007; Lim, Morris, & Kupritz, 2007).

A blended learning format can provide a more adaptive learning and instructional approach, allowing for more interaction between workshop participants and the instructor than an online-only format (Hockly, 2018). Delivering LEAP content online can be used by the student before, during, and after the workshop. Students would have access to the workshop content for future reach-back and research-based self-instruction. The goal for the future is developing blended learning strategies derived from the 2019 LEAP visits to implement in the 2020 LEAP and beyond.

## Conclusion

Driving innovation across the learning enterprise is a critical function for ArmyU. ArmyU established the Learning Enterprise Assistance Program as a service to the TRADOC centers of excellence and schools. LEAP is a unique initiative for fostering innovation because of its customer service approach to learning within a military context. The initial response to the voluntary LEAP by the TRADOC centers of excellence and schools has been very positive: at least 11 LEAP visits will be performed in FY 2019, primarily because of positive word-of-mouth recommendations. Two of the FY 2019 LEAP visits are scheduled to support non-TRADOC schools.

ArmyU will improve LEAP in the future by expanding workshop offerings in response to customer requests. The LEAP customer-service approach is rare within the military. The goal is to measure customer service within LEAP using an empirically validated customer service tool and word of mouth. It is critical that LEAP is effective in two areas: (1) the learning of the individual student (i.e., accurately and satisfactorily) and (2) the effectiveness of meeting the hosting center of excellence or school goals (i.e., dependability and value).

The future viability of LEAP also relies upon ArmyU's ability to develop an effective blended learning strategy. Delivering LEAP content online allows student access before, during, and after the workshop and supports reach-back and research-based self-instruction. The goal is to implement the blended learning design in FY 2020.

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