

CivMX

Onboarding West Point Civilians to the Army Profession through the Civilian Military Experience

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Abstract

All faculty and staff at the U.S. Military Academy (West Point) support the academy's mission to educate, train, and inspire cadets to become *commissioned leaders of character* and are responsible for contributing to the academy's *culture of character growth*. Yet, without previous Army experience, civilian faculty and staff often struggle to understand the Army profession and how to contribute to cadets' professional development. The Civilian Military Experience was developed to provide civilian faculty an immersive military and academic training experience that resembles cadet field training at West Point. This training provided civilian faculty and staff with an intimate interactive experience that led to increased understanding of the demands of cadet life and leadership within the Army profession.

Faculty and staff at the U.S. Military Academy (USMA, or West Point) are expected to educate, train, develop, and inspire cadets in a manner that aligns with the Army's professional ethic and develops the character traits and leadership skills required to succeed in the profession of arms.

Unlike most institutions of undergraduate higher education, all West Point graduates commission as officers and join a distinct profession where they are expected to have expertise in four broad fields: leader-human development, military-tech-

nical, geocultural and political, and moral-ethical (U.S. Department of the Army [DA], 2019). Their profession will immerse them in a unique culture with challenges and responsibilities unfamiliar to most civilians. At West Point, approximately one quarter of the faculty are Army civilians with no previous military experience (typically Title X), and the majority of athletic coaches are civilians with no previous military experience (with contracted positions in Army West Point Athletics). The ability to relate to students' experiences and understanding the demands of their chosen profession is integral to facilitating effective education and mentorship; civilian faculty and staff can find themselves at a disadvantage compared to their military colleagues due to their lack of knowledge of military doctrine and culture, and a lack of shared experiences.

The military culture can differ from American culture outside of a military environment. For example, the military culture has more focus on the shared values of loyalty, duty, hierarchy, accountability, respect, selfless service, courage, and toughness (Joseph et al., 2022; most of which are emphasized in Army Doctrine Publication 6-22, *Army Leadership and the Profession* [DA, 2019]). In contrast to the individual freedoms emphasized by civilian American culture, the military has a highly collectivist culture and functional imperatives where teamwork and cohesion are incentivized more than individual accomplishment (Joseph et al., 2022). Obedience, for example, is not a prioritized virtue for many civilians; in contrast, obedience has been considered the "the highest virtue" of the military (Huntington, 1981), as it is critical for pushing soldiers to do what they would otherwise never consider. Furthermore, social bonds among soldiers are strengthened through shared experiences of adversity (Chapman et al., 2021). There is also the simple difference of physical appearance. Cadets and military faculty share common uniforms, mannerisms, customs, and courtesies. These differences can provide a significant barrier for civilian faculty and staff to overcome to make a meaningful connection with cadets.

The Army values the civilian workforce and the expertise it brings to the broader team (DA, 2022). Yet, integrating civilians poses challenges; at West Point, there is no centralized orientation to the Army profession for civilian employees. In fact, civilians are often told, "You'll drink from a fire hose" when they first arrive at West Point, as they rapidly try to absorb the acronyms, the ranks, the culture, and the details of cadet life. Swain and Cantrell (2021) recently highlighted the challenges in Army onboarding in a recent article titled "The Army's Onboarding Problem." They mention that civilians must be onboarded fully. "It doesn't matter if these civilian teammates served in uniform previously or not. If they are joining your unit, they should go through the same onboarding process as their uniformed teammates" (Swain & Cantrell, 2021, "Conclusion," para. 2).

Onboarding for Army civilians often involves video modules, lectures, or reading materials. While civilians do take the same oath as military officers, they do not always have a formal oath ceremony like officers do. This type of standard



onboarding is likely not enough for West Point faculty who must connect their academic expertise to the military profession, and relate to their cadets or military colleagues.

At West Point, there is an imperative to build a culture of character growth, which requires faculty and staff to be a vital part in role modeling and reinforcing character traits essential to the Army profession. Yet, a notable gap remains that there is no training for all civilian faculty and staff to understand the challenges and responsibilities of officership and the character traits valued by the U.S. Army. To meet the need for a stronger understanding of the Army profession and to support West Point's line of effort to maintain a culture of character growth, the Civilian Military Experience (CivMX) was created as an experiential Army program for civilians serving at West Point.

The impact of an experiential onboarding program is supported by research that adults learn best from experience (Knowles, 1984; Knowles et al., 2020), where individuals first have a concrete experience, and then reflect on their experience to increase knowledge and skills (Kolb, 1984). Risk, in terms of novel, challenging experiences that place a learner out of their comfort zone, can benefit learning (Morris, 2020). Furthermore, research on outdoor experiential training suggests that such programs can positively impact group formation and development, attitudes about

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group work, communication, and leadership skills (Cooley et al., 2015; Evans & Engew, 1997; Ginting et al., 2020).

CivMX was developed as an immersive, three-day experiential orientation to the Army profession. The curriculum was developed with the following objectives: (1) to increase civilian commitment to the larger institutional mission, (2) to facilitate staff and faculty understanding for the cadet experience, and (3) to provide faculty with a greater ability to connect classroom learning to the military profession. In 2022, CivMX was executed for a pilot cohort of faculty and staff.

Method

Participants

Participants in the CivMX pilot consisted of 13 West Point civilian faculty and staff (five females, eight males) recruited through various departments, and an in-

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Elise M. Dykhuis is an assistant professor at the United States Military Academy. Her work integrates the concept of character virtues with developmental theory, such as Positive Youth Development, focusing on the dynamics between individuals and their contexts to promote holistic, positive formation. She received her PhD in child study and human development from Tufts University and previously worked with Wake Forest University in its Program for Leadership and Character, where she directed assessment and empirical research related to character interventions in college and professional school settings; she has also consulted on various other character intervention projects in higher education.

Lt. Col. Matt Arbogast serves as the deputy director for West Point's Simon Center for the Professional Military Ethic. He received his PhD in industrial and organizational psychology from the University of South Florida and his MBA from the College of William and Mary. He started his 25-year military career as a scout platoon leader in the 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment and deployed to his first combat tour in 2001 to support Operation Enduring Freedom. He also served two combat tours in Iraq with the 172nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team and the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division.



stitutional-wide email list (see Figure 1). Participants were affiliated with several departments, including seven science and engineering faculty, three behavioral science and character education faculty, and three staff with positions in administration or athletics. Their time employed at West Point ranged from less than one year to over 20 years ($M = 6.5$ years). All participants indicated that they had no direct family ties to the military outside of their own employment. One participant, the lead integrator for the Character Integration Advisory Group, was eliminated from the analyses in this article, given that they designed the experience, as well as parts of the survey.

Participants were provided with a packing list and were required to acquire Army operational camouflage pattern uniforms for the event. Participants were also provided with a cadet summer training liability waiver, and two read-ahead documents to provide background for discussion: the Army Vision (Esper & Milley, 2018) and an article on the art of followership (Disque, 2018). Lastly, participants were invited to take part in the pre-program and post-program survey for assessment purposes.

The Program

CivMX was held from 1 to 3 June 2022 at Camp Buckner, a vast outdoor training area near the West Point campus where, in parallel, cadet field training was underway for incoming West Point third-class cadets (college sophomores). Male and female participants were housed together (not separately) in barracks commonly inhabited by cadets during field training to reflect standard cadet and soldier living conditions. They were provided meals equivalent to what cadets receive when they participate in field training (e.g., “Meals Ready to Eat” [MREs] for lunch and hot meals for breakfast and dinner).

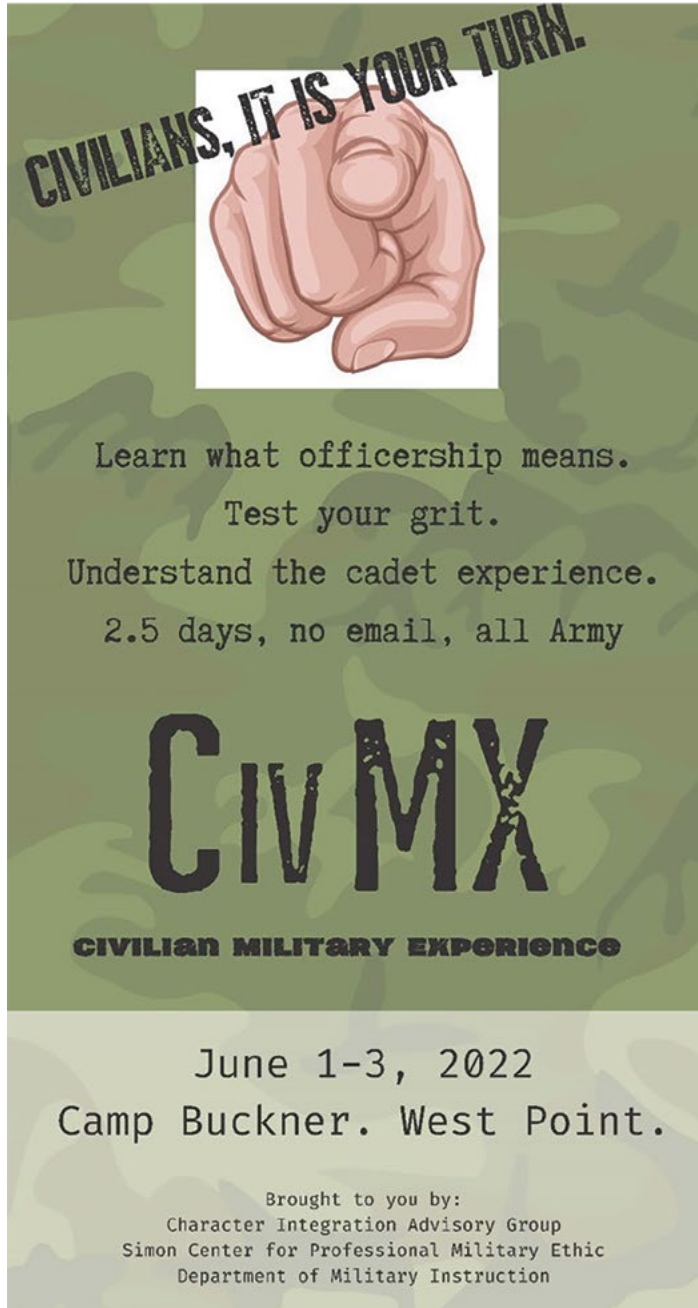
For two and a half days, participants executed practical exercises, field training events, classroom instruction, team building, and reflective exercises. Two Simon Center for the Professional Military Ethic (SCPME) platoon mentors (a lieutenant colonel and a major; authors on this article) provided supervision, guidance, training, and risk mitigation for the duration of the program. As instructors of West Point’s capstone officership course (MX400), the platoon mentors leveraged their expertise to engage participants in fruitful conversations and prompted deliberate reflection before, during, and after programmed events. During participation in field training events, participants also received instruction and coaching from site cadre, which included members of the physical education and military instruction departments as well as the cadet summer training supporting task force from the 101st Airborne Division.

The three essential components of the CivMX program were classroom experiences, field experiences, and reflection (see Table 1 for the program schedule).



Figure 1

Flier Used to Recruit Civilian Faculty and Staff at West Point



CIVILIANS, IT IS YOUR TURN.

Learn what officership means.
Test your grit.
Understand the cadet experience.
2.5 days, no email, all Army

CIV MX

CIVILIAN MILITARY EXPERIENCE

June 1-3, 2022
Camp Buckner. West Point.

Brought to you by:
Character Integration Advisory Group
Simon Center for Professional Military Ethic
Department of Military Instruction



Classroom Experience

Three formal lessons led by SCPME faculty were provided during the program: “The Professional Challenge,” “The Army Profession,” and “Inspiration to Serve (Unlimited Liability)” (see Table 2). Each lesson was developed to further participants’ understanding of the Army profession and the responsibilities and challenges associated with military service.

Field Experiences

CivMX participants executed several field exercises including a water confidence course, a team obstacle course, land navigation, patrolling, camouflage, drilling, and weapons familiarization. During the program, each participant rotated through different leadership positions (each participant served as one of two squad leaders or one platoon leader during the program), similar to what cadets experience in field training. Field experiences were designed to be as authentic as possible including tasks such as a nighttime guard shift, living quarters cleaning, and accountability exercises (e.g., one participant was “kidnapped” when they left the living area without an accountability partner). All exercises were meant to closely resemble the nuanced experience of Army training regimens and schools.

Reflection

The platoon mentors utilized Socratic questioning to guide participants through reflective after action reviews after each training experience. This encouraged participants to analyze and confront the behaviors, attitudes, and commitment necessary to be a member of the Army and to facilitate their understanding and appreciation of their roles in preparing cadets for the profession of arms. Four themes were focused on throughout these reflection sessions: trust, followership, responsibility, and team cohesion (see Table 3 for more details).

Data Collection Procedure

To evaluate the impact of the experience, a repeated measures survey, in addition to several open-ended questions, was administered to the entire group of participants at three time points. The first survey was distributed six weeks before the experience ($n = 10$), the second survey was given out the week after CivMX ($n = 12$), and a third survey was given six months after CivMX ($n = 11$). Participants were made aware of the voluntary and anonymous nature of participating in the research survey and were provided a consent form before filling out the questionnaire. All procedures were approved



Table 1
CivMX Schedule

DAY 1	DAY 2	DAY 3
Arrival and Orientation	Wake up / Formation	Wake up / Formation
Move into Living Quarters	Class #2 The Profession of Arms	Move out of Living Quarters
Class #1: The Professional Challenge	Basics of Land Navigation	Drill and Ceremony
Water Obstacle Course	Introduction to Patrolling Techniques / Camouflage	Q and A and Reflections with Platoon Mentors
	Mock Patrol	Additional Weapons Familiarization
Change Clothes / Lunch	Weapons and Equipment Familiarization	Observe Cadet Summer Training Briefing
Team Obstacle Course Event	Hygiene and Reflection Exercise	Class #3 Inspiration to Serve Cemetery Tour
Evening Dinner and Guided Reflections	Clean Living Quarters	
Overnight Fire Guard	Overnight Fire Guard	

by the institution’s review board. As part of the survey, participants invented their own PIN to keep the data anonymous and have some way to link the repeated measures. Ideally, a within-subjects analysis could be performed; however, too few PINs aligned to allow for that type of analysis. Instead, means across time points were compared.

Measures

In the quantitative survey pre- and post-program participation, participants were surveyed on various items that measured sense of belonging within the Army, and the degree to which the participants “understood” their cadets. Across the pre- and immediate post-surveys, we asked the following as internally developed questions: To what extent do you feel you are part of USMA? To what extent do you feel you are part of the Army? Relative to your military peers, how well do you feel you understand the cadet experience? All questions were placed on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 100 (totally). Free response “explain why” questions followed. The following were derived as belonging questions from the Workplace Belongingness Scale (Jena & Pradhan, 2018): When referring to USMA to outsiders, how much do you refer using “we/us” rather than “they/them”? When referring to Army to outsiders, how much do you refer using “we/us” rather than “they/them”? These questions were rated on a scale from 1 = Never to 5 =



Table 2
 “Classroom” Experiences during CivMX

<p><i>The Professional Challenge</i></p>	<p>CivMX will demonstrate that officership is difficult; it requires continuous, lifelong strengthening of one’s character, competence, and commitment. Military effectiveness and survival on the battlefield depend upon prompt, enthusiastic obedience. CivMX introduces the Army culture and regulations that require subordinates to comply with commander’s orders and emphasizes the goals of the team above personal considerations. CivMX discussions will consider how the volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity of modern warfare could cause some orders to become obsolete. Civilian faculty and staff will learn how officers need to exercise their professional judgment to seize unforeseen opportunities and accomplish the mission when the situation changes. Officers are needed who are trustworthy enough to take initiative because they have been certified in character, competence, and commitment.</p> <p>Faculty and staff will learn that the rapid pace of conflict does not allow subordinates to wait for updated orders before acting. The mission command operating doctrine provides a framework of seven principles for officers to lead their units in ever-changing situations. Predicated on trust, a mission command philosophy enables commanders to provide intent and then trust subordinates to exercise disciplined initiative to achieve that intent. Capable subordinates are trusted to take the appropriate action, without direct orders or supervision, to accomplish the mission. Trust is the enabler, for without trust, commanders will exercise direct control and subordinates will hesitate to change course.</p>
<p><i>The Army Profession</i></p>	<p>The U.S. Constitution establishes civilian control of the military; thus, as a commissioned officer, it is imperative to understand the unique authorities and responsibilities conveyed in the commission, along with the legal and moral obligations incurred upon taking the oath. The words of the Commissioning Oath seem simple; however, they carry great moral weight given the responsibilities and authorities being delegated by the president of the United States. The civilian faculty and staff are taught that the public oath is a vow to the American people to well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office upon which they (and officers) are about to enter. It is worth reflecting on the oath’s meaning for both them and the cadets they develop. Armed with this understanding, faculty and staff will be better equipped to exercise stewardship of the Army Profession.</p> <p>CivMX will show how the military exists to serve and defend the American people. However, the “horizontal relationship” between the military and the civilian society is complex. Military professionals have experienced the differences between military and civilian culture, and they sometimes lament what they sacrifice as a member of the profession of arms. At times, the values that make America great run contrary to the values that make its Army great. America places high value on individual liberty, while the Army requires you to voluntarily relinquish some individual freedoms. America values individual pursuits, while the Army focuses on team accomplishments. The values of the protected often collide with the necessary values of the protectors.</p>



Table 2

“Classroom” Experiences during CivMX (continued)

<i>Inspiration to Serve (Unlimited Liability)</i>	<p>The Army Profession doctrine establishes membership to include both civilian and military personnel. Department of the Army civilians and officers take the same oath on the day they join the Army Profession. However, the risks and possible consequences of that oath are very different for military personnel who are also joining the profession of arms. That difference is the officer's and soldier's acceptance of unlimited liability—the willingness to suffer and inflict death and physical injury. For the officer, it is also an understanding that his or her orders may result soldiers' deaths under their leadership. Unlike other professions, the profession of arms places life and death decisions in the profession's youngest members.</p> <p>Unlike other professions, the profession of arms expects that its members are willing to die or suffer great injury because of their service. No one likes to think about death and injury. However, officers must accept this unlimited liability and hopefully use it to motivate themselves to develop the expertise and provide the leadership necessary to minimize death and injury. During CivMX, participants will visit the West Point Cemetery and hear stories of those service members that have made the ultimate sacrifice in service to their nation.</p>
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Always. In the immediate post-surveys, we also asked participants free-response questions: Has your understanding regarding your role in building leaders of character here at West Point changed as a result of the CivMX experience? Would you recommend CivMX and why/why not? What was the most beneficial aspect of CivMX? What was the least beneficial aspect of CivMX? In the six-month follow up (after a semester of teaching), we asked the Workplace Belongingness Scale questions and the following question: To what extent do you feel you are part of the Army? We asked a free-response question: Has CivMX influenced you this semester and how?

Results

Pre-CivMX

Free response questions before the experience were asked about what makes participants feel connected to West Point and the Army, and how well they understand the cadet experience. The responses before participation in CivMX reveal sentiments of disconnection from participants. Seven out of nine pre-survey respondents noted that their lack of military background made them feel less connected to USMA/Army. The following quotes highlight this:



Table 3
Themes Used for Reflections and Discussion

Trust	Centered on what we know about the future battlefield and the characteristics of the Army Profession, we reflected on the fact that trust is the bedrock of the profession of arms (Army Doctrine Publication 6-22). Officers and DA civilians are stewards of the profession both in and outside the institution; they are responsible for exploiting the strength of our profession and to fulfill its obligation by being trusted and categorically trustworthy.
Followership	Much of the discussions considered the instability, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity of modern warfare that cadets will likely encounter. So, questions on how officers resolve the dilemma between obedience and disobeying without becoming a toxic subordinate were considered for reflection. How does this pertain to the DA civilian? What criteria determine when an officer or DA civilian can disobey a lawful order? What kind of person can be trusted to disobey in a profession and culture that demands obedience? Leading is hard but following is harder.
Responsibility	Reflection on responsibility centered around the oath of office each commissioned officer and DA civilian takes to serve as members of the Army Profession. The words of the commissioning oath carry great moral and ethical weight given the responsibilities and authorities being delegated by the president of the United States and established through the U.S. Constitution. Their oath is a vow to the American people to well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office upon which you are about to enter; it establishes the individual commitment to the profession. The oath forms the community's distinct cohesion.
Team Cohesion	Service in the Army Profession requires all members, military and civilian, to work as a team to fulfill the responsibilities of our oath of office. Military endeavors are not individual pursuits. Cohesive teams are essential to the effective pursuit of the Army's mission.

“I don’t feel a part of the Army at all, and am reminded pretty consistently, mainly by cadets, that I’m not. I also pick up on my own from listening to others who have extensive backgrounds in the Army, that I simply don’t have that knowledge or understanding which is a bit of a subliminal message that I’m not a part of it. I feel like I work for the Dept. of the Army, but not the more highly respected ‘Operational Army.’”

“I do not understand the terminology of the Army, its organization, or how the cadets are broken into platoons and what not.”

Six out of nine pre-survey respondents noted that they had poor understanding of the cadet experience, as the quotes below highlight:



“I don’t understand their experience, nor do I understand what they will be going into. I’m picking up pieces but it’s all from a conceptual basis and not from a more visceral understanding which I think military peers can more relate to.”

“Again, not as connected to USCC side of things, day to day sometimes easy to forget military academy and just see college students in front of me, very aware I’m a civilian.”

Post-CivMX

Descriptive statistics indicated that, directly post-experience, nine out of 11 participants said that their understanding regarding their role in building leaders of character at West Point changed because of the CivMX experience. After CivMX, participants’ free responses indicated the divide between themselves and their colleagues with a military service background was still perceived (7/10 noted this in their free responses). Consider, for example, the following quotes, which highlight how the program made them feel more connected:

“Certainly through CivMX I feel much more connected or at least I have a better understanding of where I fit into the army profession which helps me feel connected.”

“Before CivMX, I considered my role as only in the academic pillar. I felt that character development was done by other members of the staff and faculty. This was typical ‘stovepipe’ thinking. Cross functional experiences such as CivMX breaks down those barriers.”

A one-way ANOVA for quantitative analysis showed that feelings of belonging in the Army increased significantly from pre-CivMX to directly post-CivMix, and the six-month follow-up indicated stayed effects, $F(2, 30) = 7.37, p = .002, \eta^2 = .330$ (95% CI [.056, .513]). Bonferroni post-hoc comparisons of the three groups indicate pre-CivMX scores were significantly lower than immediate post-CivMX scores ($p = .013$); although immediate post and six-month post changes were not significantly different, the differences between the pre- and six-month follow-up surveys were similarly significantly different as the pre- and immediate post-survey ($p = .004$) (see Table 4). There were no significant changes in how participants rated themselves on the Workplace Belongingness Scale items, in contrast. We acknowledge that with this sample size, and without a comparison group, this interpretation is a promising initial evaluation of the impact of this program, although it lacks full statistical control. Despite these limitations, these data support the overwhelming qualitative data.



Table 4
Self-Report of Feeling of Belonging in the Army

	Pre-CivMX	Post-CivMX (the following week)	Post-CivMX (six months later)
Number of respondents (total <i>N</i> = 12)	<i>n</i> = 10	<i>n</i> = 12	<i>n</i> = 11
To what extent do you feel you are part of the Army? (0-100 scale) <i>M(SD)</i>	41.10 (23.61)*	68.40 (23.11)*	73.64 (14.33)*

*Bonferroni post-hoc comparisons of the three groups indicate pre-CivMX scores were significantly lower than immediate post-CivMX scores ($p = .013$) and six-month post-CivMX ($p = .004$)

Eight out of 10 participants indicated in their free responses that CivMX had improved their understanding of their roles in USMA/Army. The following quote illustrates this:

The [CivMX] program really helped to put the ‘army’ context into lived form. I felt a part of the ‘Army’ during it, a part of the ‘teaming’ process that others speak about but that we dont [sic] have the same experiential opportunities / feelings for as civilians. This program, led by officers, with layered in operational Army features, really helped to bring everything to life and make connections that I hadn’t previously made. The sessions on the Army profession were really well done, were informative and thought provoking. The messages were clear and repeated throughout.

Eight out of 10 participants indicated in their free responses that CivMX improved their understanding of the cadet experience; the quotes below highlight this bridged understanding.

“I have a much better understanding of the cadet training experience now than I did before CivMX. I understand the mental and physical challenges in a way that I did not a week ago.”

“CivMX helped me better understand the leadership skills that cadets need to have when they leave USMA. I understand better how one of the courses that I teach is put together and why it is the way it is. I also better understand



that my role is not just my subject matter expertise, but extends in subtle ways beyond that.”

“The insight into the cadet experience, from the weight of leadership to the frustration of following, from the fear of heights and being pushed slightly beyond your physical limits gives new insights and ways to reach our students. I look forward to seeing the impact my CivMX experience has on my teaching and cadet development activities.”

Seven out of 10 post-survey respondents said that the field training and “lived” experience were beneficial, as exemplified by the quotes below:

“Most beneficial was being immersed in it for 72 hours non-stop. The layered in pieces that [the mentors] Tom and Marc so skillfully built in was phenomenal (starting off with accountability, continuing accountability in multiple ways-buddy system, fire guard, etc.), physically challenging us together, getting our hearts pumping, teaching new and hard skills, putting us out of our comfort zones, having really thoughtful and reflective conversations, leadership rotations, them OOZING Army virtues out of them—they BELIEVE this and LIVE it. I can’t say enough about Tom and Marc. They made this insanely meaningful. Biggest lesson—hard to be a good leader, harder to be a good teammate.”

“The team activities (i.e., obstacle course activities, land nav) and the rotation of leadership positions. I think these allowed us all to better understand the values and lessons that we want cadets to experience and embrace.”

All respondents (12/12) would recommend the Civ/MX program to their civilian peers. Table 5 shares all the comments in response to this question.

Six months later, we asked one free-response question: “Has CivMX influenced you this semester and how?” Nine out of 12 participants responded to these questions and six of these nine mentioned how the experienced helped them better connect to cadets and provided them with shared experiences to share in class. Two explicitly mentioned they were able to use military/summer training examples in class. For example:

“It helped having some shared experiences—I talked to the cadets about some of their summer experiences like Land [Navigation] and the [Water Confidence Course]. We were able to relate some that to the course material (the idea of being apprehensive and maybe a little lost, how to adapt and

Table 5

Would You Recommend CivMX to Your Civilian Peers?

10000% I've already talked to several people about it and cant praise it enough. This was truly the first time that I felt like I was a part of the infamous Army 'team' that we are known for. I came here looking for it, and this program was where I first felt edges of it. Huge kuddos to Marc and Tom and their leadership and modeling made this just tremendous in that aspect.

Absolutely! The insight into the cadet experience, from the weight of leadership to the frustration of following, from the fear of heights and being pushed slightly beyond your physical limits gives new insights and ways to reach our students. I look forward to seeing the impact my CivMX experience has on my teaching and cadet development activities.

Absolutely. I'd do it again if I had the chance.

Absolutely. One, it's a completely unique experience you wouldn't get anywhere else; two, it's gonna help you relate to your cadets that much better; three, you're gonna learn a lot about yourself and others, and we are in the business of character development, which means we need to be in the business of our own personal, professional, character development too.

ABSOLUTELY. EVERYONE SHOULD DO THIS. HOW CAN YOU POSSIBLY TEACH CADETS WITHOUT UNDERSTANDING WHAT THEY GO THROUGH AND WHAT THEY ARE BEING TRAINED FOR. WE NOW HAVE A COMMON LANGUAGE AND ARE MORE LIKELY TO INTEGRATE COMMON THEMES ALONG CURRICULUM.

Hell yes. From the minor, (It gives one a bit of street cred), to the major (It make one a better and more informed instructor). Bonus, it was a lot of fun and a good team building exercise with staff one does not normally interact with.

Without a doubt, life changing, I am so much more respect for the Army service even though had only a small taste.

Yes

Yes! It was a great experience where I learned about cadet life, the army profession and built stronger relationships with my civilian peers.

yes, only the ones worth it

Yes. It was a great experience. It was enjoyable, challenging, and I learned a great deal about the cadet experience, the profession of arms, leadership, and followership. It also helped me to learn about myself as a leader, a follower, and a teammate.

Yes. It's beneficial to help bridge the perceived gap. It was a growth opportunity for all.

improve, etc.). Personally seeing the commitment and professional stewardship of our instructors inspired me to redouble my instructor development efforts.”

Five of the nine comments indicated instructors had a better understanding of what we were developing cadets for and how they, as faculty and staff, could contribute to this purpose. Participants enthusiastically suggest the program is worthy of offering again. However, most participants still acknowledged that they did not feel

completely integrated into the Army and West Point. While CivMX helped them understand their role in the profession, participants still feel a distinct separation from actively serving military faculty at West Point. One consideration that continues to make civilians stand out, and feel disparate from their active-duty Army colleagues, is the uniform.

“I don’t get to wear OCPs, so visibly, always look different. That is a bigger deal to me than I think officers around me realize. I feel more connected when I learn the correct language, acronyms, and even experience what they do.”

Discussion

Understanding the requirements of the Army profession, the role of an officer, and the character traits cadets must develop to be effective and trustworthy are key components to effectively develop and educate cadets at West Point. CivMX provided participants with an experiential opportunity to learn about the Army profession. Despite the small sample size, the results suggest that their feelings of belonging increased, as did their ability to empathize with the cadet experience.

A few unique aspects helped make the program successful. First, the interactive classes were taught by SCPME faculty who are well-versed in illustrating how Army doctrine and the challenges of modern military operations connect with the teamwork and leadership qualities we need to develop in West Point cadets. The platoon mentors, who were also SCPME faculty, effectively utilized questions and discussion to promote participant engagement and likely increased commitment to the role of character development in support of the Army profession.

Second, teamwork was emphasized—particularly the importance of being a good teammate and not solely a leader. A central characteristic of military teams is the supremacy of the team and mission completion over the wants of the individual. Participants were placed within a platoon and asked to lead and follow their peers who had an equal lack of military experience. Even the most basic tasks of communicating through a chain of command initially seemed foreign and cumbersome. The nuance of communicating up, down, and across the simulated chain of command sparked important conversations about trust. Critical to the success of these exercises was the ability of the officer cadre to provide greater understanding for each exercise during group reflection exercises (known as after action reviews). The officers specifically emphasized the importance of team dynamics and the imperative for teamwork. A key component of this learning experience was the unstructured conversations that occurred between officer mentors and participants throughout the duration of the two-and-a-half-day program. The programmed experiences prompted introspection and stimulated ad hoc conversations about military culture and norms. These con-

versations were perceived by the officers to be valuable learning opportunities for the participants and seemed to have a significant impact on their understanding of the Army profession. Several participants' comments support this perception:

"Impromptu discussions with us helped to provide a context I previously did not possess."

"We don't learn from experience, we learn from reflecting on experience."

"It wasn't just do something adventurous, but rather, what does this mean, why do we do this, why does this matter?"

Reflections, like the conversations around task delegation and trust, were a vital part of the experience. Participants were encouraged to consider how an exercise or experience mapped on to the greater curriculum of developing future leaders of character for our Nation's Army. The ambiguity of the tasks and realism of the experience at hand allowed mistakes to be made, which led to an internal examination of the rationale behind activities. For example, one participant ignored the order to perform hygiene activities in the evening because they preferred to shower in the morning. This mistake led to a discussion about the importance of following orders, but also about the "why" or purpose behind orders—in this case, it was explained that going to sleep prior to conducting hygiene activities would leave a soldier unprepared for the following morning's activities, could soil a soldier's only available bedding, and potentially lead to medical issues. During a patrolling exercise, instead of spot correcting the fact that many participants attempted to take charge rather than dutifully performing their role, the platoon mentors allowed the confusion and disorganization amongst the team to continue and integrated the learning point in the post-exercise reflection. Allowing participants to participate in authentic military exercises and make mistakes allowed for a more impactful learning experience.

Throughout the planning and execution of this program, the officer cadre were focused on providing the most realistic experience possible that was both mentally and physically challenging but not to a level that might decrease morale or leave participants too stressed to participate fully in the educational activities. The program designers questioned whether the program needed to be overnight and fully immersive. There was also a great deal of debate as to how motivated the civilian participants would be to participate in both physically challenging events, such as the water obstacle course, and the routine, often mundane, tasks performed in the normal course of Army life including guard shifts, sanitation of facilities, and strict adherence to basic military standards. During execution, it became clear that the immersive and challenging elements of the program were essential to its success.

Participants took each exercise seriously, showed great determination in the face of personal fears or physical difficulty, and readily engaged in all assigned tasks. They were also willing to grapple with concepts such as personal discipline and the challenges of teamwork and trust that were made more poignant and powerful due to the program's verisimilitude.

At West Point, civilians touch many cadets through teaching, coaching, and mentorship. Understanding the profession cadets are entering and the experiences cadets have can make these interactions more impactful and meaningful. Programs like CivMX that provide military civilians a chance to experience and better understand military culture will likely have similar benefits in military settings outside of West Point. Beyond impacting civilians' interactions and training of cadets and military personnel, these programs have the potential to foster a greater sense of belonging in civilians, positively affect overall team cohesion, and encourage civilian stewardship of the profession. ☞

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