

(PHOTO: U.S. Army)

The Criticality of Captains' Education

Now and in the Future—An Update

Lt. Col. Keith R. Beurskens, U.S. Army, Retired

THIS ARTICLE UPDATES the November-December 2010 *Military Review* article by William M. Raymond Jr., Keith R. Beurskens, and Steven M. Carmichael, “The Criticality of Captains’ Education: Now and in the Future.”¹ Significant changes have occurred across the Army since 2010; nonetheless, the education of captains remains a critical component of leader development of the officer corps. The major conclusions of the original article are still relevant today and into the near future, principally that the Captain’s Career Course (CCC) is essential to developing critical and creative thinkers who are agile and adaptive enough to address complex problems.

The Army Leader Development Strategy and the Army Learning Model

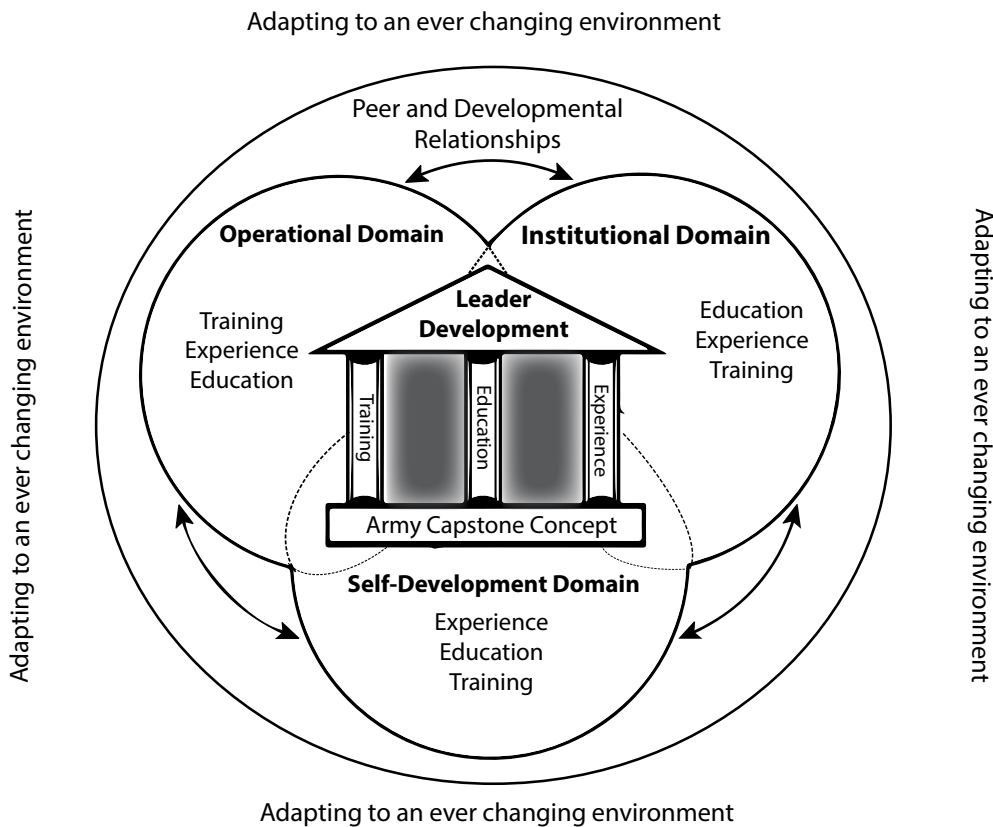
The Army Leader Development Strategy 2013 (known as the ALDS) was published with the signatures of the sergeant major of the Army, chief of staff of the Army, and secretary of the Army.² The ALDS establishes the ends, ways, and means for rebalancing the three crucial components of training, education, and experience across the operational, institutional, and self-development domains of leader development. The ALDS describes leader development as—

...the deliberate, continuous, and progressive process—founded in Army values—that grows Soldiers and Army Civilians into *competent, committed* professional leaders of *character*. Leader development is achieved through the career-long synthesis of the training, education, and experiences acquired through opportunities in the operational, institutional, and self-development domains.³

Lt. Col. Keith R. Beurskens, U.S. Army, Retired, is the deputy director of the School of Advanced Leadership and Tactics at the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College. He holds a B.S. from Utah State University and an M.S. from the University of Colorado, Boulder.

Implementation of the Army leader development model (see figure) supports the ALDS.⁴ The U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) was still developing the Army Learning Concept in 2010. TRADOC Pam 525-8-2, *The U.S. Army Learning Concept for 2015*, was published in January 2011.⁵ TRADOC subsequently published a directive in March 2011 to implement

the concept as the Army learning model.⁶ The objective of the Army learning model is the same as originally described in the 2010 *Military Review* article: “the creation of a learning continuum that blurs the lines between the operating and generating forces by more closely integrating self-development, institutional instruction, and operational experience.”⁷



The Army leader development model

2010 CCC Study Update

In February 2010, the U.S. Army Combined Arms Center commander created a team to examine the CCCs and assess if they were developing officers consistent with the requirements of Army Regulation 350-1, which states that the CCC “provides captains with the tactical, technical and leader knowledge and skills needed to lead company-sized units and serve on battalion and brigade staffs.”⁸ The team assessed five interrelated focus areas for each CCC: curriculum, facilities, governance, staff and faculty, and students. Finally, the timing of the

study provided an opportunity to examine the 2009 common core redesign soon after implementation.⁹ The CCC study, published in June 2010, provided a picture of the state of the Army’s CCCs.

The study presented 47 findings and 71 recommendations across the five focus areas.¹⁰ It highlighted five key findings. First, there is no substitute for a high-quality small-group leader. Second, the curriculum must be current, relevant, and rigorous. Third, there is a need for increased oversight of rigor in CCC governance, especially for a formal process to reconcile common core and branch curriculums.

Fourth, most CCC classrooms need to be updated with educational technology and configured to support small-group instruction. Finally, students questioned for the study overwhelmingly emphasized the benefits of a resident course requiring a permanent change of station (PCS):

- Learning from peers and instructors with diverse backgrounds (including Army, other service, and international military students).
- Personal and professional development and networking opportunities.
- Time to achieve balance and to reset.

Sixty-one of the original 71 recommendations from the 2010 CCC study have been fully implemented, and eight others are being implemented. All of the five key findings and associated recommendations have been addressed.

First, small-group leader selection is now a priority assignment, coordinated between branch commandants and U.S. Army Human Resources Command. Small-group leaders also receive the same faculty development program as instructors at the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College (CGSC), focused on educational instruction and facilitation.



U.S. Army captains at Fort Benning conducting wargaming during the new Captain's Career Course common curriculum pilots. (U.S. Army)

Second, the CCC common core curriculum has been rewritten completely to apply adult education principles and reflect Doctrine 2015. The course now uses the experiential learning model. Student requirements include several briefings, writing assignments, and a comprehensive exam.

Third, CGSC's School of Advanced Leadership and Tactics, established in October 2010, provides staff management of the CCC and is the proponent for the common core curriculum. The Combined Arms Center Commandant/Director of Training Conference and the Army Learning Coordination Council now provide governance of CCC. Fourth, the number of classrooms updated with educational technology and configured to support interactive small-group instruction has increased, with more classroom upgrades planned as part of TRADOC's Army School Classroom Modernization Program known as Classroom XXI (referring to a program to transform classrooms into state-of-the-art student-centered multimedia environments with 24/7 remote access). Finally, the CCC will remain a resident course, requiring a PCS.

From Initial Concept to an Approved Mid-Grade Learning Continuum

In 2010, the 2015 CCC concept for implementing an approved mid-grade learning continuum for captains and mid-grade officers was described as follows:

Upon promotion to first lieutenant, all officers would take an Army learning assessment (ALA), which establishes a baseline for each officer's learning requirements. If significant gaps are identified in an officer's foundational proficiency required for resident phases, he or she would be required to complete a preparation course (which is also for sister service and international military students). The common core resident phase (currently at 7 1/2 weeks) would be completed at the current unit prior to change of station in a small-group, peer-to-peer facilitated seminar in an on-post regional learning center or temporary duty and return if there is not a learning center at their location. The officer will then be assigned to his or her next permanent station, attending the branch phase enroute.¹¹

Between 2010 and 2012, the original CCC concept was tested during several pilot programs, with the lessons learned from the pilots resulting in significant changes to the concept, and, ultimately, approval of a mid-grade learning continuum.

The mid-grade learning continuum expanded to include the development of mid-grade officers from the rank of first lieutenant through promotable captain and warrant officers from the rank of warrant officer 2 through promotable chief warrant officer 3.¹² The intent of aligning officers and warrant officers within the course was to provide a common framework for leader development and ensure the horizontal and vertical alignment of the development of enterprise-wide leader competencies shared by mid-grade leaders. The officer and warrant officer courses include four components (ALA-1, Officer Self-Development Program-1 [OSDP-1], professional military education, and OSDP-2) tailored to each cohort's requirements.

Initiation of the officer mid-grade learning continuum takes place upon promotion to first lieutenant, when the officer takes the ALA that measures his or her knowledge in foundational Army and branch doctrine. The ALA-1 results will provide remediation guidance for the officer to complete OSDP-1, guided self-development, consisting of common core and branch doctrine learning modules for areas found to need improvement. Once piloting is complete, the ALA-1 and OSDP-1 completion will become a prerequisite to attending the CCC.

The CCC will continue to be a course requiring a PCS. The common core curriculum will not exceed eight weeks of instruction. The common core may be executed as a distinct module at the beginning or end of the course, or it may also be sequenced no lower than block level within branch material. The branch curriculum may follow the common core module and include tracks of instruction tailored to officers'

past education, training, and experience, or it may be sequenced with common core blocks.

The final portion of the mid-grade learning continuum is OSDP-2, continuing through the officer's branch key developmental assignments. Each OSDP-2 comprises tailored and modular learning agreed upon by the unit commander, branch commandant, and officer. It effectively completes the officer's prerequisites for the Command and General Staff Officer's Course and beyond. The mid-grade learning continuum model for the Reserve Component is equivalent to the Active Component model and similar in sequence and design. The only significant difference is the distributed learning delivery of portions of the instruction for Reserve Component officers versus primarily resident instruction for Active Component officers.

The mid-grade learning continuum began initial operating capability in fiscal year 2014 with the full implementation of a new CCC common core and Army learning model course design. The ALA, OSDP, and Reserve Component elements of the mid-grade learning continuum will be piloted and phased in with full implementation in fiscal year 2017.

Conclusion

The 2010 CCC study provided a valuable baseline for making critical improvements to the CCC, and the findings and recommendations established a way ahead for revising captains' education. The mid-grade learning continuum builds on the 2010 CCC study and the Army Learning Concept and extends learning beyond the schoolhouse. It establishes a program of career-long learning supporting the goals of the ALDS. The CCC is the foundation for the mid-grade learning continuum and continues to be essential to developing critical and creative thinkers who are agile and adaptive enough to address complex problems. **MR**

NOTES

1. William M. Raymond Jr., Keith R. Beurskens, and Steven M. Carmichael, "The Criticality of Captains' Education: Now and in the Future," *Military Review*, November-December 2010.

2. *Army Leader Development Strategy 2013*, found at <<http://usacac.army.mil/cac2/CAL/repository/ALDS5June%202013Record.pdf>>.

3. *Ibid.*, 3.

4. *Ibid.*, 8.

5. TRADOC Pamphlet 525-8-2, *The United States Army Learning Concept for 2015* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office [GPO], 20 January 2011).

6. Operation Order 11-008, *Army Learning Concept 2015 Implementation Plan* (Headquarters, U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, Fort Monroe, VA, 14 March 20), 11.

7. Raymond, Beurskens, and Carmichael: 55.

8. Army Regulation 350-1, *Army Training and Leader Development* (Washington, DC: GPO, 18 December 2009), para. 3-32.

9. At the time of the study, the common core curriculum comprised 7 1/2 weeks of keystone and capstone doctrinal foundations (based on Field Manuals 3-0, 5-0, 6-0, 7-0, and 6-22, which every U.S. Army captain received).

10. Special Commission from The U.S. Army Combined Arms Center, *Report of Findings and Recommendations 2010 U.S. Army Captains Career Course Study*, 14 June 2010.

11. "2015 Captains Career Course (CCC) Concept," Draft version 1, (School of Advanced Leadership and Tactics, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 3 June 2010).

12. "The Mid-Grade Learning Continuum for 2015," A White Paper, Version 1.1 (School of Advanced Leadership and Tactics, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 11 July 2013).