



Chief Warrant Officer 5 Darren Cook (*right*) and Capt. Joseph Koennecke discuss changes to the maintenance culture 15 February 2017 before Cook's presentation to more than 120 officers in the Captains Career Course at the Maneuver Center of Excellence, Fort Benning, Georgia. Now retired, Cook was the command chief warrant officer for the U.S. Army Materiel Command at Redstone Arsenal, Alabama. He traveled across the Army collecting feedback about the changes occurring with the Army's maintenance system. (Photo by Sgt. Eben Boothby, U.S. Army)

# The Rapid Redesign of the Captains Career Course

## An Example of Agility in Professional Military Education

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*All Army units, organizations, and agencies will ensure that they prioritize execution of all activities and use time to enhance the readiness and lethality of our formations.*

—Army Directive 2018-07

The 2018 National Defense Strategy identified that professional military education (PME) stagnated. It noted that PME focused more on accomplishing mandatory credit over ingenuity and

supporting products focused on providing captains with a foundational professional military education based on Army doctrine in leadership, the Army profession, operations, mission command, the operations process, training in units, critical thinking, problem solving, and effective communication. Subsequently, schools have used SALT's common-core materials to support their branch-specific tactical and technical instruction. Since its implementation in 2013, eight weeks of the twenty-one-week CCC course have been core-curriculum focused (see figure 1).



(Figure by Kuchinski)

**Figure 1. Captains Career Course Model (Fiscal Year 2018)**

lethality.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, in March 2018, the Army University Office of the Provost undertook a comprehensive review of the mandatory requirements resident in the Captains Career Course (CCC) curriculum to identify potential opportunities to reduce those requirements while providing the branch schools with more time to improve branch tactical and technical competencies. In the weeks that followed, the Midgrade Learning Continuum (MLC) team used guidance from the Combined Arms Center (CAC) commanding general and the National Defense Strategy to redesign the CCC core curriculum.<sup>2</sup> The updated common core of the CCC shifts emphasis to large-scale combat operations (LSCO) while simultaneously providing additional course time for branch schools to focus on efforts to enhance lethality and ingenuity.

### Background on Common Core

The CCC prepares more than eight thousand graduates a year with “the tactical, technical, and leader knowledge and skills needed to lead company-size units and serve on battalion and brigade staffs.”<sup>3</sup> In 2011, as a result of a 2010 study that identified a need for more formal oversight of the common-core curriculum at the CCCs, the CAC formed the School for Advanced Leadership and Tactics (SALT) to design and develop CCC common-core courseware for all branch schools.<sup>4</sup> SALT developed 240 hours of learning content with

### Midgrade Learning Continuum Team

The establishment of Army University included integrating SALT as the MLC team, Instructional Design Division, within the Directorate of Academic Affairs at the Office of the Provost. The MLC team develops resident and distributed-learning products to support implementation of core curricula at both the CCC and the Warrant Officer Advanced Course. The ten-person MLC team includes both military and civilian instructor/developers who produce over four hundred hours of resident and distributed-learning courseware in support of both courses. Additionally, the team conducts annual curriculum workshops to ensure CCC and Warrant Officer Advanced Course instructors understand common-core lesson materials while also providing a leader workshop to help course leaders successfully execute the courses at their respective schools. Figure 2 (on page 90) shows the common curriculum modules and their corresponding hours developed by the MLC for the CCC at the start of fiscal year 2018.

### Agility of Common Core

The MLC team continually supports schools by routinely updating the common-core curriculum to align with senior-leader guidance, account for new and emerging doctrine, and implement changes in mandated or directed topics in PME. Indeed, the CCC



(Figure by Kuchinski. Note: student reflection and research time not included)

## Figure 2. Captains Career Course Common-Core Modules (Fiscal Year 2018)

common-core curriculum is not stagnating. With the publication of Field Manual (FM) 3-0, *Operations*, and the renewed focus on LSCO, the MLC team redesigned the core curriculum to provide greater emphasis on offensive operations against a near-peer threat in a multi-domain environment. While mainly impacting

the eighty-one hours of curriculum in the “Operations” and “Operations Process” modules of instruction, the publication of FM 3-0 also required the team to update the common-core staff exercise and provide doctrinal updates during curriculum workshops to ensure instructors are prepared to teach the new material.

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### Focus on Lethality

The CCC common-core updates also address the concerns identified by the National Defense Strategy by focusing more on enhancing the lethality and readiness of the Army. Prior to this redesign, the common core contained more than twenty hours of mandatory topics in the “Leadership Essentials” module and up to sixty additional hours of mandated or directed topics embedded in other areas. To better provide branches with more time to get the “sets and reps,” or practice, needed to increase lethality and readiness, the MLC team removed or integrated mandatory and directed content in lesson plans, providing schools with an additional two weeks to focus on branch technical and tactical outcomes. As a result of the rapid redesign and shift away from an emphasis on mandatory topics, the MLC team redesigned and restructured the content in the “Leadership” module to form the “Army

Profession” module. The “Army Profession” block now includes an introductory presentation by school commandants intended to reinforce the importance of being a professional leader of character in the Army. The redesign and integration of mandatory topics also enabled the MLC team to completely remove the

opportunity to address identified shortfalls in the training and education of the captains, particularly with the synchronization of operations and execution of rehearsals. In all cases, schools used the time to enhance the branch-technical readiness and lethality of their students.<sup>5</sup>



(Figure by Kuchinski. Note: student reflection and research time not included)

**Figure 3. Redesigned Captains Career Course Common-Core Modules (Fiscal Year 2018)**

“Leadership Essentials” and “Across Cultures” modules from the common-core courseware. Figure 3 illustrates the redesigned common-core course.

### Sets and Repetitions

Branch schools used the rebalanced time from the common core to increase the amount of time dedicated to branch-technical outcomes. Specifically, schools added additional iterations of branch-focused content including more opportunities to learn how to defeat near-peer threats through the military decision-making process while also integrating with other branches. Schools also added more time to develop branch-specific planning and execution products including estimates, annexes, and synchronization matrices. Finally, branches gained the

### Acceptable Risk

Like many compressed planning-and-execution cycles, there are risks to implementing a rapidly redesigned course. Undeniably, there is a risk that some of the integrated, consolidated, or removed content may not achieve the intended common-core learning outcomes. There is also a risk that some students and instructors may marginalize the importance of some newly integrated topics that previously had dedicated time. Finally, there is a risk some proponents may perceive their content, subject-matter expertise, or learning products are underutilized or underrepresented in the course. To overcome these risks, the MLC team will continually address identified concerns with schools and use the Accountable Instruction System to assess



common-core outcomes and determine where further refinement or redesign is required.<sup>6</sup>

The MLC team will also continue to work with CCC instructors and course leaders during MLC workshops to explain the importance of integrated topics and help identify potential points of unintended marginalization of integrated topics. The MLC team will also communicate with proponents such as the Center for the Army Profession and Ethic, the Sexual Harassment/Assault Response and Prevention Academy, and others to ensure accurate and up-to-date content is effectively integrated where appropriate.

## Way Ahead

The updated CCC common core provides greater emphasis on LSCO while providing the branch schools more time to focus on enhancing lethality through increased technical and tactical abilities of Army captains. The redesign does so by avoiding an overemphasis on mandated topics. It requires the instructional design process to balance agility and

Retired Maj. Gen. Bernard Loeffke speaks to a group of Maneuver Captains Career Course, Infantry Basic Officer Leadership Course, and Armor Basic Officer Leaders Course students 24 February 2014 at Derby Auditorium, Fort Benning, Georgia. Loeffke was speaking about his views on the relationship between the United States and China. (Photo by Patrick A. Albright, U.S. Army)

responsiveness with acceptable risk. It also requires course developers, course managers, instructors, proponents, and schools to all work together to effectively prioritize, develop, and evaluate learning content. The rapidly changing environment and the ever-increasing demands placed on our soldiers to fight and win in LSCO requires PME to be agile and adaptable to maintain the readiness and lethality of the force. The redesign of the common core and branch-technical curriculum in the CCCs provides an example of how curriculum adaptation and change can help to ensure PME remains agile, relevant, and focused on enhancing Army readiness. ■

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## Notes

**Epigraph.** Mark T. Esper and Mark A. Milley, Memorandum for Principal Officials of Headquarters, Department of the Army Commander, "Army Directive 2018-07 (Prioritizing Efforts—Readiness and Lethality)," 13 April 2018, accessed 6 July 2018, [https://www.army.mil/e2/downloads/rv7/leaders/ad\\_2018\\_07\\_prioritizing\\_efforts\\_readiness\\_and\\_lethality.pdf](https://www.army.mil/e2/downloads/rv7/leaders/ad_2018_07_prioritizing_efforts_readiness_and_lethality.pdf).

1. Office of the Secretary of Defense, "Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America" (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2018), 8, accessed 3 July 2018, <https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>. The 2018 National Defense Strategy stated that professional military education was "stagnant" and "more focused on mandatory requirements than lethality."

2. "School of Advanced Leadership and Tactics and Mid-Grade Learning Continuum Overview" (PowerPoint presentation, U.S. Army Combined Arms Center [CAC], Fort Leavenworth, KS, 5 March 2014), accessed 6 July 2018, [https://usacac.army.mil/cac2/cgsc/salt/docs/SALT\\_MLC\\_Brief.pdf](https://usacac.army.mil/cac2/cgsc/salt/docs/SALT_MLC_Brief.pdf). The School for Advanced Leadership and Tactics (SALT) initially conducted the analysis, development, and implementation of the Captains Career Course core curriculum in support of the Midgrade Learning Continuum (MLC) 2015 initiative from the Army Professional Leader Development Panel in 2012. The MLC team subsumed SALT's mission when Army University was established in 2015.

3. Army Regulation 350-1, *Army Training and Leader Development* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Publishing Office, 10 December 2017), 74.

4. 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.

5. School information provided during the CAC Commander's Senior Leader Session 18-3, 30 May 2018.

6. U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) Pamphlet 350-70-7, *Army Educational Processes* (Fort Eustis, VA: TRADOC, 9 January 2013), fig. 2-1. The Accountable Instruction System is an educational program evaluation process that includes the Post Instructional Conference and the Course Design Review.

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