



Col. Mark H. Landes, commander of 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division, pins new rank insignia on Master Sgt. Monolito Brown, the brigade's senior human resources NCO. (US Army photo by Sgt. John Ortiz)

Master Leader Course Non-Resident overview: Keys to success

Sgt. 1st Class Kahlil D. Warner

Distribution Headquarters, Defense Logistics Agency

According to the course management plan for *Master Leader Course Non-Resident*, the *MLCNR* provides the Army with competent senior noncommissioned officers who maintain a positive presence and who are self-aware, adaptive, and able to shape the joint operational environment. The course management plan further explains that today's senior NCOs must understand decisive action and mission command executed through combined arms formations. Additionally, the course delivers operations-capable master sergeants who can lead a force to fight and win in complex OE from battalion and brigade levels to echelons above corps. The topics covered in this essay will pertain

to command support, breakdown of the six-week curriculum, keys to successful completion, and conclusion.

Command Support

Before students begin *MLCNR*, there must be a clear understanding between them and their chain of command regarding course demands and expectations. The level of support for students enrolled in the six-week course became apparent. Students who had full command support generally had ample time to apply a deeper method of critical and creative thinking and formulate that thought into constructive input during complex problem-solving scenarios, discussion boards, journals,

practical exercise, and group projects. Command attention increase students' mental focus and work towards maximum absorption of lesson content.

Students without command support generally struggled to achieve satisfactory course standards. Combine this lack of support with students' inability to navigate blackboard, communicate with peers effectively, and apply structured time management and it is a recipe for poor performance or failure to meet course standards. Most students enrolled in *MLCNR* may have primary jobs which consume the majority of their time. Additional outside distractions; such as family considerations not experienced in a resident course due to students' remote location, may also take away available time.

Once students are selected to attend *MLCNR*, senior leaders in their direct chain of command should counsel them on their expatiations and offer adequate time to complete the course based on individual capabilities and mission demands. Leaders must be engaged in their subordinate's career and personal life to correctly assess and assist the student during the six-week course.

The Break Down

MLCNR is an intensive six-week course that covers the four Army learning areas: Army leadership and profession, human dimension, professional competence, and mission command (as described in chapter two of the *Army Mission Command Training and Education Plan*, June 2017). Each lesson is broken down further each week with the last two weeks covering the *Military Decision Making Process* and staff exercise. Week one provides an *MLCNR* overview and six lessons that cover listening, public speaking, briefings, writing skills, leadership, and the 10 principles of a servant leader which challenges students to think of leadership outside the conventional method of *Be, Know, and Do*. Students will begin to submit journals, and participate in discussion boards and practical exercises through blackboard. Topics are assigned for individual research papers and groups are identified.

During week two, students cover the fundamentals of management, organizational management, training management, critical thinking and problem solving, Department of Defense strategies, and Army/joint doctrine (JP 3.0, 2017). For some students, this is the first time they experience DoD strategies, which expand their understanding of how they effect units at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels. During this week, they submit individual research papers for peer review. At this point, discussion board participation, reflective quizzes, and practical exercise grades will affect overall grade point average. It is imperative students work on communications skills and contribute to their assigned group.

Week three continues to require students to submit journals, participate in practical exercises, reflective

quizzes, and discussion boards. The final research paper is also presented for grading. Students must take the time to review their research papers and use the [Purdue University Online Writing Lab](#) guidelines for proper format.

Mission command is also this week's focus. Students learn how commanders visualize and understand the operational environment through operational variables (political, military, economic, social, information, infrastructure, physical environment, and time — known as PMESII-PT) and mission variables (mission, enemy, terrain and weather, troops and support available, time available and civil considerations — known as METT-TC). This lesson increases their ability to relate past experiences with current mission command doctrine. Other lessons during this week focus on joint intelligence preparation of the operational environment, the joint planning process, and operational art and design (JP 2-01.3, 2014). These lessons, combined with feedback from peers and instructors, help students prepare for the first and second group projects.

Week four follows the same format of previous weeks with the recurrence of journals, practical exercises, discussion boards, and reflective quizzes. However, students will complete their first group project, which requires them to interact as a team and submit a "voice over" power point presentation. It will present many challenges and require collaboration from all team members. They must identify a group leader who is responsible for slide submission timelines, slide deck format, suspense dates, slide order, and final product submission.

Week five and six also require students to submit journals, practical exercises, discussion boards, and reflective quizzes. During the last portion of *MLCNR*, students work on completing their course of action briefs. These briefs are presented in "voice over" power point and are derived from week five and six lesson content and from the "training only" operations order.

Keys to Success

Throughout *MLCNR* six-week curriculum, students are academically challenged in areas that may force them out of their comfort zone. Once enrolled, students should understand the dedication required to successfully pass and ultimately excel during this course. In my view, the pillars of success in *MLCNR* are vision of success, time management, critical and creative thinking, and communication skills.

Visualizing success at the end of the road strengthens the mind and provides positive reinforcement during challenging lesson requirements. Since *MLCNR* provides unique challenges for Soldiers who have to juggle primary job requirements against course required content, some students may lose focus and become frustrated during difficult moments. It is imperative they understand that, although challenges

may seem impossible, visualizing individual success provides the needed “push” to complete course requirements during time constants, complex scenarios, communication gaps and other factors which raise stress levels during the course.

Time management is a crucial key to success. Because *MLCNR* is web-based, students who have experience with on-line college courses or have competed courses through Blackboard have the least trouble navigating the course work. Students must establish a rhythm early in the course. Because week one does not have many course requirements, it allows students to develop a base rhythm. Failure to establish this rhythm may present challenges in the following weeks.

“Give me six hours to chop down a tree and I will spend the first four sharpening my axe.” —President Abraham Lincoln (Lincoln, n. d.)

During my *MLCNR* experience, there were many times I had to think critically about journals, reflective quizzes and discussion boards. They sparked the creativity to help me solve the issue. This simple step quickly became the base for every situation I encountered during the course and filtered into my daily scope and responsibilities. Students with the ability to apply this method of thinking early on may achieve a higher GPA.

MLCNR instructors encouraged students to use the DEEP (Define, Explain, Elaborate, and Provide examples) strategy when submitting assignments.

- Define — state the precise meaning of a word.
- Explain — make understanding clear by providing detail.
- Elaborate — put forth complex details.
- Provide examples of — incorporate the explanation and elaboration with personal experience, historical reference, or point of view.

When students apply the DEEP method, they show critical and creative thinking habits which send a

message to instructors of their ability to understand and retain the course content.

One of the most important pillars to consider is mastering the ability to effectively communicate. Grades depend heavily on Soldiers’ ability to work well with others, which comes into play with discussion boards, practical exercises, peer reviews, and group projects.

If placed into a leadership role, students must use communication skills due to the course’s remote nature. The group leader is responsible for corralling products and input from other students for group projects, even though some students are non-receptive.

“We have two ears and one mouth so that we can listen twice as much as we speak” —Epictetus (Epictetus, n.d.)

Receiving input from peers and establishing strong lines of communication may be the difference between failure and success. Students must understand that a majority of their classmates reside in different time zones and are from different Army branches. This diversity requires special attention from students who volunteer or are selected for leadership roles. Students should not expect a deployed team member to have products submitted at the same time as local team members. Communication is a key to success in *MLCNR*.

Conclusion

MLCNR is a challenging course which provides the Army with competent senior NCOs who maintain a positive presence and are self-aware, adaptive, and able to shape the joint operational environment. If students appreciate the importance of *MLCNR* and how it impacts their organization and career, they will succeed and possibly exceed course standards.

“Leaders are made, they are not born. They are made by hard effort, which is the price which all of us must pay to achieve any goal that is worthwhile.” —Vince Lombardi (Lombardi, n.d.) ■

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