

# Program Teaches Future Sergeants Major To Boost Soldiers' Wellness

By Clifford Kyle Jones, NCO Journal

January 19, 2017



A student in the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy's Class 67 does a standing a jump during an assessment for the Executive Wellness Program. (Photo by Clifford Kyle Jones / NCO Journal)

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The new year will bring a crop of sergeants major with a new outlook on wellness.

Class 67 at the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy is taking part in the Executive Wellness Program, which is intended to merge information on the Performance Triad with resilience training to help new sergeants major become better Soldiers and leaders.

"We're trying to bring those two together to help mitigate health issues and optimize readiness," said Sgt. 1st Class Darin E. Elkins, noncommissioned officer in charge of the Executive Wellness Center at USASMA. "With the Performance Triad — sleep, activity, nutrition — we're doing a baseline assessment."

Students were screened about their personal habits, including questions about whether they got enough sleep, how many fruits and vegetables they ate, how much activity they engaged in, and whether they had any pain.

The baseline assessment took place in the fall, near the beginning of Class 67's instruction. In addition to questions, each of the more than 600 students were run through physical drills such as short sprints, one-footed hops, and holding yoga positions to assess their speed, dexterity and flexibility — as well as identify any lingering pain. The students also underwent vital signs tests and used a machine to check their body fat composition, a more precise measurement than the commonly checked body mass index.





A student in the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy's Class 67 does a one-legged hop during an assessment for the Executive Wellness Program. (Photo by Clifford Kyle Jones / NCO Journal)

As part of the assessments on each area of the triad, the students were coded as green, amber or red — green meaning doing well, amber indicating borderline performance in an area and red suggesting the Soldiers need to improve their sleep, activity or nutrition habits.

Immediately after the assessment, Soldiers met with a dietitian, a physical therapist and a clinical social worker to discuss their results.

At the final station of the assessment, Elkins said, wellness program representatives made sure all the students were signed up for RelayHealth, a Web portal that provides access and appointments to doctors and other health professionals, and knew how to use it and what resources the site provides.

The baseline assessment was just the start of the program, Elkins said. Throughout their time at USASMA at Fort Bliss, Texas, the students of Class 67 will be given further assessments and access to information and resources to help them improve their health and resilience and to teach



their Soldiers to do the same when they return to their units as sergeants major.

"They all get a baseline, to know where they are," Elkins said. "The idea is to have them identify those mitigating issues and then at the end of the school year or the class year, do another baseline to see if there are any changes: Did they learn anything? How can they use that information to take out to the operational Army when they leave here? How can they best optimize readiness for their Soldiers?"

"You build on (the baseline assessment) to change habits or to incorporate better habits," he continued. "I've dropped modules in strategically throughout the school year."

Elkins said 24 modules, each focusing on different aspects of the Performance Triad or resilience, are available electronically for discussion as part of Class 67's coursework. The Executive Wellness Program also provides information guides, challenge guides and other technological resources to better teach the future sergeants major how to set wellness goals, eat for performance, enhance Physical Readiness Training and deal with sleep deprivation.



A student in the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy's Class 67 stretches in a yoga pose during an assessment for the Executive Wellness Program. (Photo by Clifford Kyle Jones / NCO Journal)

Representatives from the Comprehensive Soldier and Family Fitness office at USASMA also took part in the Executive Wellness Program assessments. CSF2 will teach Class 67 the Master Resilience Training course, and Elkins said including the office in Performance Triad training will help teachers "bring it all together" when it comes to the effects of sleep, nutrition and activity on mental resilience.

Elkins said, "There are a lot of things Soldiers don't know, especially when they're 19, 20, 21," about treating pain, behavioral health, using dietitians or receiving physical therapy.

"Some of the ownership needs to be on the individual," Elkins said, "but they can't own it if they don't know what the resources are. So we try to help them identify some of the ailments, some of the things they're not doing well. Now they can address that on their own."

Master Sgt. Decarlo Johnson, a student in Class 67, said he was all green after the assessment. He said he arrived at USASMA fairly familiar with the Performance Triad and tried to implement optimizing techniques already.

He was, however, new to the body fat composition testing machines.

"I was interested to see what my body fat composition was, and I think they should do that more for Soldiers with the machine," Johnson said.

"That's a great machine to have. If you had that in the unit, Soldiers would be more aware of their body fat and what they need to do to maintain" their weight.

Even though the concepts of the Performance Triad and resilience were familiar to him, he was excited to see the Executive Wellness Program for new sergeants major.



A student in the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy's Class 67 does a standing jump during an assessment for the Executive Wellness Program. (Photo by Clifford Kyle Jones / NCO Journal)

"It'll definitely help," he said of the wellness program. "We have Soldiers who are overweight who can benefit from the nutrition and sleep (information) if they have problems with sleeping. If you get your sleep right, nutrition might be better, so I think it'll benefit a lot in the unit."

Lt. Col. Cyndi McLean, a physical therapist from the Executive Wellness Office at USASMA, said Johnson's realization that each aspect of the Performance Triad affects the others is exactly what the program is trying to teach.

"If you consider one aspect of that triangle, if you're doing really well, you're probably going to have some benefits carry over to the other aspects of that triangle," she said. "If you're not doing so well in one of those corners of the triangle, you might be having some negative detriments in the other areas as well. The intent is to make sure that you're optimizing each of those categories to make sure that you're being the best Soldier that you possibly can.

"In this setting, we're not only asking them to look at that for themselves personally but professionally," McLean continued. "These are the senior leaders who are going to be in charge of those formations in just a few months. They're going to be those sergeants major. Are they making sure their Soldiers are optimizing their performance with regards to sleep, activity, nutrition?"