

Town Hall Discussions Were Wide-Ranging, Vital To NCOPD

By Jonathan (Jay) Koester - NCO Journal

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OK, you missed it live. But it's a week later, and you *still* haven't found the time to watch the NCO Professional Development Town Hall? Allow The NCO Journal to give you a little inspiration.

The following are a few excerpts from the conversation to whet your appetite. You can hear much more on these topics, plus plenty of others, by watching the full town hall here.

State of NCO Development Town Hall



Moderating the town hall was Master Sgt. Mike Lavigne of the 1st Infantry Division. Answering questions were Command Sgt. Maj. David Davenport, command sergeant major of U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command; Aubrey Butts, director of the Institute for NCO Professional Development; Sgt. Maj. Annette Weber, G1 and G4 sergeant major for TRADOC; Command Sgt. Maj. Brunk Conley, command sergeant major of the National Guard; and Command Sgt. Maj. Jim Wills, command sergeant major of the Army Reserve.

Select, Train, Educate, Promote

The first question of the night came via video, from Sgt. Joseph Wilson, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division: “With the new STEP program, a Soldier has a certain time frame to attend the corresponding NCO Education System upon promotion. For smaller career fields that offer the Advanced Leader Course a few times a year, this creates a backlog of highly qualified NCOs and hinders their progression. Is there any plan in the future to fix this?”

Davenport: “Sgt. Wilson, I think your question really gets at capacity. Do we have the capacity to train? We do. But when you go in and look at the allocation of school seats, especially as you indicated, in low-density MOSs, we have to make sure we are spreading those seats across the year so that Soldiers have the opportunity to attend those schools.”

Weber: “I think it also gets back to communication. Soldiers have to communicate with their branches, their leaders, and get their thoughts out there, so that we can get them into those schools that they need to go to.”

Conley: “Especially in the low-density MOSs, and especially in multiple-phase courses, it’s very challenging for our Soldiers who have a three-phase course. ... One of the things my command sergeant major advisory council in the National Guard is looking at is, if a Soldier shows good faith and attends phase one of a course, we’re looking at adjusting the policy so that we could promote them upon completion of phase one, conditionally. If they’ve shown good faith — they’ve gone to school, they’ve met height and weight, they’ve met PT — we promote them pending completion of the follow-on courses. Then, if they don’t complete, that promotion would be taken away. But it starts the clock on time in service, time in grade, and if they’ve shown the effort to finish the first phase, I think we need to look at that.”

Wills: “We are going to have to work together and probably look at some of the challenges we’ve had in the past, we will need to look at the size of the classes ... the student-to-instructor ratio, so that we can conduct more frequent classes and allow more opportunities, especially for the Guard and Reserve.”

Army University

This question came via Twitter: “Are Army University and its programs accredited, and by whom? And if not, when are these expected?”

Butts: “Right now, Army University isn’t accredited. However, we are going to use the joint transcript to record all Soldiers’ experience and education. We want the Soldier to be able to get a degree from the college they want a degree from.”

Davenport: “If there is any cohort who benefits from the Army University concept, it’s the noncommissioned officer cohort. Because what Army University does for us is it takes our education and our experience in leading Soldiers and it puts it in terms that academia understands. It translates into college credits.”





Command Sgt. Maj. David Davenport, command sergeant major of U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, has makeup applied before sitting under the bright lights of the town hall studio March 3 at Fort Eustis, Virginia. (Photos by Jonathan (Jay) Koester / NCO Journal)

Broadening assignments

This question came via the chat board: “How does the Army reconcile the fact that broadening assignments, such as drill sergeant and recruiter, have a little role in being selected for promotion during centralized selection boards?”

Weber: “The proencies are updating their messages to the boards, so that information will get to the boards, because those jobs are very important jobs to the different CMFs (Career Management Fields).”

Lavigne: “It is safe to say it’s weighted differently, though?”

Davenport: “Of course, by CMF. Because they have a view of what they think makes a successful master sergeant or whatever grade we’re talking about, and the proponents write that guidance.”

Wills: “It’s important for the Army Reserve Soldiers to understand that once they go out to that broadening assignment, they need to go in, do their time and move on to another opportunity. We have a lot of folks who want to, kind of, homestead an opportunity. They don’t want to get out of it.”

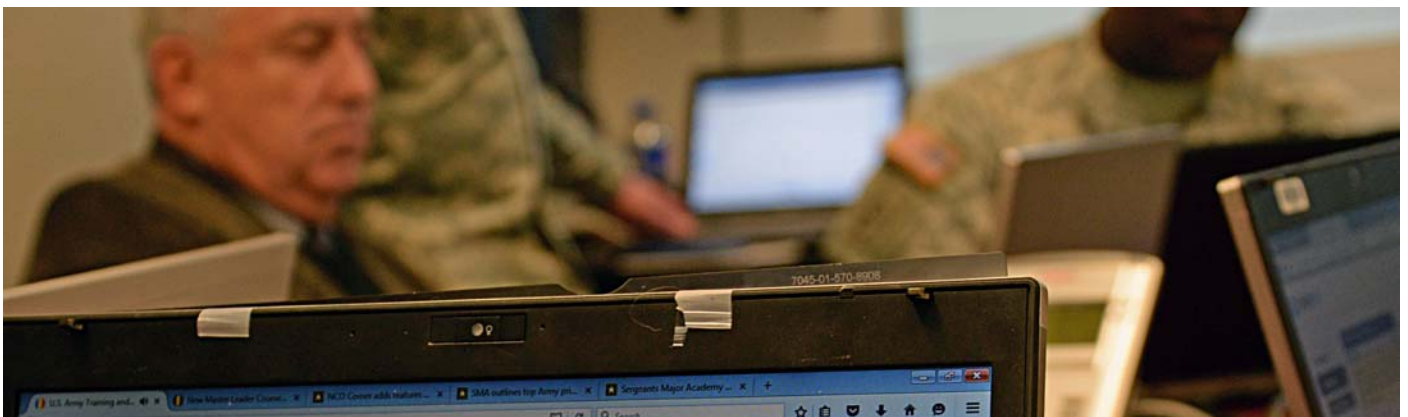
Master Leader Course

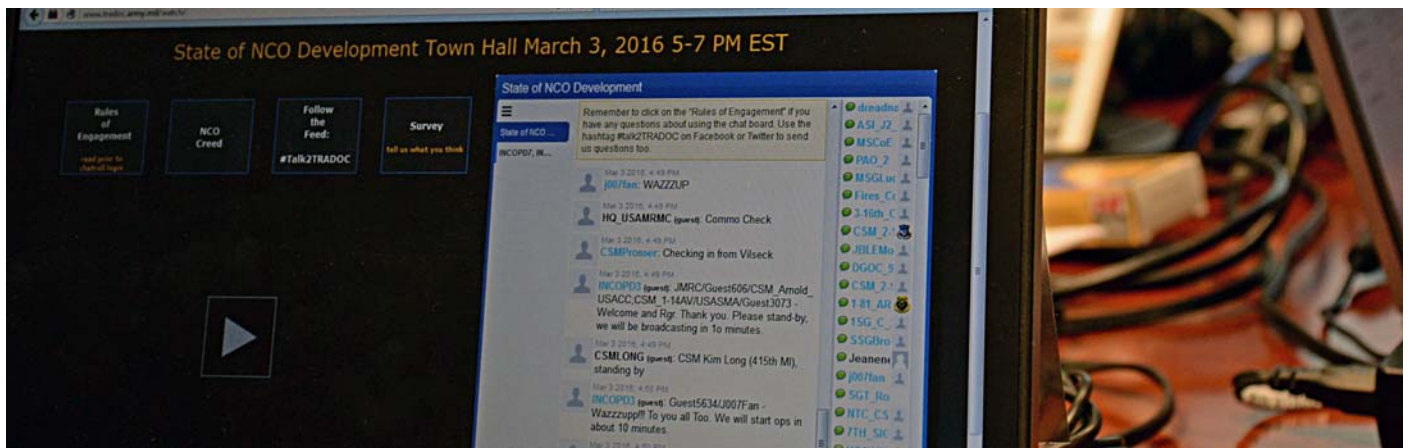
This question came via the chat board: “How will the Master Leader Course be implemented? Is it residency, online or MTT (Mobile Training Team)?”

Butts: “It’s going to be in some form or another, all three. However, we’re trying to get it to residency or MTT.”

Davenport: “We’ve gone through a pilot at Fort Bliss, Texas. We did an iteration at Camp Williams, Utah; the National Guard hosted that. And next week at Fort Knox, Kentucky, Sgt. Wills will have the second pilot of the MLC. We’re getting a lot of positive comments back about the rigor. ... It’s not the First Sergeant Course, if I can get that plug in there. This course is really designed to start making those senior noncommissioned officers aware of the transition from the tactical level of our Army to the operational, and giving them a glimpse into the strategic level.

“Dr. Butts is exactly right. We will do it brick and mortar. We’ll have the ability for MTT. And then we will do it by distance learning for the reasons we talked about earlier, for our Guard and Reserve, to make sure they’re not penalized. Because STEP applies to everybody. It’s not just staff sergeants and sergeants first class. If you want to become a master sergeant, our gap analysis said you have to be certified in those core competencies before you move forward.”





A group of NCOs and policy experts quickly answer questions posed during the town hall.

Structured Self-Development

This question came via video, from Sgt. 1st Class Caleb Barrieau: "With all the educational distance learning systems out there that our Soldiers are using to get their civilian degrees with, what is TRADOC doing to update or improve the SSD courses so that they are more interactive and valuable as a tool so that our Soldiers are completing their institutional training requirements?"

Davenport: "I hear a lot about SSD, and the comments are that it's not to standard, and I somewhat agree. So, what we've done is we've formed a working group down at the United States Sergeants Major Academy and have begun a review of SSD-1 all the way up to level six.

"I've heard from the force. They want some type of academic grade to come as a result of this rather than just a 'go' or 'no go' and they want it to count for something. We're working on that. Another comment that has come from the force is that if a Soldier doesn't understand, or just tries to check the block, lock them out. We're working on that, as well."



Amy Robinson of U.S. Army Public Affairs, left, and Liston Bailey, chief of the Learning Innovations and Initiatives Division of the Institute for NCO Professional Development, respond to NCOs' questions on social media during the town hall.

Drill sergeants

This question came via the chat board: “Do we plan to bring drill sergeants back into the AIT (Advanced Individual Training) environment?”

Davenport: “We are moving forward with putting drill sergeants back into the AIT training environment. It’s a recommendation. Of course, we have to see about funding, but we’re trying to do everything we can to make sure our Soldiers are successful when they transition to their first unit of assignment.”

The standard

This question came via the chat board: “What does equivalency mean in our NCOES? If it means the same standard for the active component and Reserve component, and the Reserve component has a hard time meeting the standard of the active component, should the standard be adjusted? Do we expect the same standard across all three components when it comes to NCOES?”

Conley: “The standard is the standard. Period, end of discussion. There is no active component/Reserve component standard: It’s an Army standard. Our Soldiers don’t want any different standard than anybody else who’s going through any course, any training, any event.”

NCOER

This question came via Twitter: “How are senior NCO boards affected by the new NCO Evaluation Report and rater profiles?”

Davenport: “I don’t know yet, because we haven’t experienced it. We don’t know how the board will interpret this. We will learn a lot during this next promotion board.”

Conley: “It has to be OK to get a ‘C.’ A ‘C’ is a passing grade. You want to get to the ‘B,’ and maybe your first year or the first time you’re evaluated as a staff sergeant, you’re not as good as somebody who has been doing it two or three years. Maybe you get a ‘C’ your first year, and you say, ‘OK, what do I need to do to get up here to a “B” and an “A” when it’s time for me to be considered for promotion.’ If you don’t get a true evaluation, you don’t know what to improve on.”

Weber: “I’m really excited about the new NCOER because I think it forces leaders to really sit down with Soldiers and counsel Soldiers. ... It gives you that opportunity to sit down with your leader so that he or she can tell you what you are doing or not doing, and how to get to where they need to get.”