



Cultural exchange activities in the International Military Student Pre-Course foster mutual understanding and build camaraderie among students. These interactions are crucial for enhancing interoperability and solidifying strategic alliances between the U.S. Army and its partner nations' military. (U.S. Army photo by Amanda Sullivan)

IMSPC: Building Relationships and Interoperability

By Retired Command Sgt. Maj. David J. Lee Jr., Sgt. Maj. Timothy D. Roberts, and Retired Sgt. Maj. Cody J. Thomas

Sergeants Major Academy

The Sergeants Major Academy (SGM-A) has been educating senior enlisted leaders since 1973.

During Sergeants Major Course (SMC) Class 6, the SGM-A hosted its first International Military Student (IMS), Warrant Officer Class One (WO1) Robert May of Australia. However, only in Class 28 did another IMS, WO1 Geoffrey Guest of Great Britain, attend the course. Significantly, after graduating, Guest became the SGM-

As first international instructor (U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy [USASMA], n.d.).

The Army realized the SMC was a way to build relationships and interoperability among its allies and partners. In conjunction with Class 33 (January 1988), the SGM-A conducted its first International Military Student Program pilot course, made up of students from five countries. Based on its success, the program has

continued since then and to date, the SMC counts 1,279 IMS as alumni (USASMA, n.d.).

A critical element in IMS attendance at U.S. military schools is the Field Studies Program (FSP), which provides U.S. allies and partners an “opportunity to promote mutual understanding and establish good working relationships with U.S. military and civilian personnel, and classmates from other nations” (Department of Defense [DoD], 2017, p. III-4).

The FSP’s purpose is to enhance IMS formal education, training programs, and orientation (DOD, 2017). As required by DoD Instruction (DoDI) 5710.17, the FSP focuses on 11 facets of the American democratic way of life: human rights, law of war, international peace and security, U.S. government institutions, political processes, judicial system, free market system, media, education, health and human services, diversity and American life.

Within the SGM-A, the International Military Student Pre-Course (IMSPC) addresses FSP requirements while providing additional elements to improve international students’ academic performance and writing skills. Beginning with Class 72, the SGM-A dedicated 120 hours to a rigorous academic writing program within the IMSPC.

Strategic Importance

The 2022 National Defense Strategy notes, “close collaboration with Allies and partners is foundational for U.S. national security interests” (DOD, 2022, p. 14). Similarly, the National Military Strategy identifies strengthening relationships with allies and partners as a key joint force task (Charmain of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2022).

The SGM-A understands its role in meeting these strategic objectives and expanded the IMSPC for SMC Class 75. The IMSPC will provide education and resources directly applicable to the student’s SMC projects throughout the academic year.

The IMPC accomplishes this through a series of reflective exercises captured in the IMS’s “Application Workbook” following each Noncommissioned Officer (NCO) Professional Development System (NCOPDS)-related lesson.

The Application Workbook challenges students to determine how they will apply the information from the IMSPC to develop or improve their nation’s NCOPDS. They can then use the ideas generated in their Application Workbook as the genesis for specific academic assignments in the SMC. This approach allows refining and validating their initial thoughts on NCO development.

The end state is a tangible product students can use to support SMC academic requirements and one they can take back to address training or education gaps in their countries’ military. In addition to the short-term benefits while enrolled in the SMC, the IMSPC supports U.S. strategic interest and prepares international students to lead continuous transformation, strengthen

their profession, and improve training and leader development in their home country.

Continuous Transformation

Through the IMSPC, the SGM-A saw an opportunity to provide its international students with a deeper understanding of the myriad components, processes, and systems required to establish and maintain a robust NCOPDS.

The revised IMSPC dedicates an additional 11 lessons/20 hours of instruction to this endeavor. This revision enables continuous transformation in the learner’s home country, providing lessons in analysis and Doctrine, Organization, Training, Materiel, Leadership and Education, Personnel, Facilities, and Policy (DOTMLPF-P).

International students can use the skills they learned to identify gaps in their own country and use them as topics for assigned projects during their time in the SMC.

For instance, the analysis and DOTMLPF-P lessons relate directly to the Department of Force Management’s assigned white paper and two course-long writing assignments – the Professional Writing Paper and Capstone Paper.

By providing a foundational knowledge of the U.S. Army’s NCOPDS, the IMSPC allows international students to devise and refine a strategy for their own NCOPDS, strengthening their countries’ NCO corps and its military profession.

Strengthening the Profession

The U.S. Army NCOs’ competitive advantage results from “the Army’s institutional commitment to develop a professional corps of NCOs” through progressive and sequential training, education, and experiences across the institutional, operational, and self-development learning domains (Department of the Army [DA], 2023, p. 1).

The U.S. Army model will not work for all allies and partners, but it does provide a proven example of a way to develop NCOs. The IMSPC provides the students with tools and knowledge they can use to evaluate their current NCO development programs and potentially shape their future.

This evaluation begins by identifying the various types of analysis – such as goal, topic, target audience, resource, and DOTMLPF-P – required to assess their current NCO development program.

The IMSPC program of instruction (POI) also covers the potential organizational structure and necessary faculty certifications to support progressive and sequential training and education in the institutional learning domain.

IMSPC’s goal is not for students to port or copy the U.S. Army NCO development model into their army. Instead, it provides resources and knowledge so they can best help their nation address its specific NCO development challenges.

Training and Leader Development

The U.S. Army believes leader development is most successful when based on proven methods (DA, 2022). However, as with the other aspects of the IMSPC focused on NCO professional development, the goal is to provide adoptable or adaptable methods based on the needs of the students' military.

The Army recognizes that creating a leader development program requires "understanding a situation, envisioning a desired future, and planning effective ways to achieve that future" (DA, 2022, p. 5-3), which is precisely the outcome the revamped IMSPC seeks to achieve.

It provides the framework for international partners to train and develop leaders in their home nation through instruction on junior leader development programs, developing NCO support systems, and identifying U.S. and global agencies to assist in those efforts.

The IMSPC lessons on junior leader development programs, NCO support systems, and U.S. and global agencies and organizations provide a holistic approach to training and leader development while focusing

on specific details that continue to build on the interoperability of U.S. partner nations. It is imperative to share training, educational, and leader development efforts so they continue to grow and flourish as the U.S. solidifies its strategic alliances.

Conclusion

The SGM-A is expanding IMSPC to improve interoperability between the U.S. Army and allied forces by providing education that equips international students with the knowledge, skills, and resources that encourage continuous transformation, strengthen the profession, and train and develop leaders in their home countries.

It will take time for the international students to incorporate the knowledge and tools gained from IMSPC into their enlisted professional military education. However, seeing best practices in action while attending the SMC imprints the strategic importance of placing enlisted professional military education at the forefront of their professionalization efforts. ■

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