

Leadership and Mentoring: A True Commitment

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ESO's Corner

The Fort Riley Army Education Center has recently received approval to implement eArmyU. What is eArmyU? eArmyU is a program that offers soldiers an opportunity to advance their education through a technology package that includes a laptop computer with an Internet Service Provider account, an email account, and tutoring and mentoring programs. The program is offered through a consortium of academic institutions offering certificates, associate, bachelor, or master's degrees on-line to soldiers.

The purpose of eArmyU is to increase retention in the Army by allowing soldiers to earn credits, degrees, and certificates at low or no cost to them while they serve on active duty to develop educated, technology-savvy soldiers who will succeed in the missions and on the battlefields of the 21st century.

Over the past few years the Army education system has undergone unprecedented change. The on-line technological approach, taking classes anywhere and anytime, has transformed the focus and goals of Army education, challenging the military to set higher expectations for all students and holding everyone, from the soldiers themselves to commander, accountable for successful academic performance.

These recent educational initiatives have focused much energy on improving instruction and increasing the knowledge and skills of the military. The Army is capturing emerging technology to develop an unparalleled level of precision, speed, and battlefield awareness. As the Army grows more sophisticated, the demand for education will increase and lifelong learning will become the norm for enlisted, officer, and civilian personnel alike. Hence, we as educators must embrace the knowledge, skills and abilities to create and manage the high technology learning/training environment. Although the Army advocates a "high technology learning/training environment" as the new direction for its educational system, evidence of true mentoring to ensure a soldier's success remains elusive.

So Who's Concerned?

At the recent conference of the University Continuing Education Association (UCEA), held 15-16 April in San Antonio, Texas the theme, "The New Majority", highlighted the new non-

traditional student and on-line instruction. It was reported that non-tradition students compose almost 73% of the current college population. The military college student population, on the other hand, is composed of almost 100% non-traditional students. The non-traditional student, the New Majority, is no longer the 18-22 year old earning a Bachelor's degree from a four-year university, but rather, a working adult with family responsibilities attending school part-time or through distance learning. Working with non-traditional students, however, is not a new challenge for the military. Dr. Richard Florida, author and professor at Brookings Institute, further described the need to build a creative society through the universities of the New Age, emphasizing technology, tolerance, hands-on learning, and the need to think, talk, and reflect. In his book, *The Creative Class*, Dr. Florida expressed that businesses of tomorrow will relocate where the creative and technologically savvy future employees live, frequently migrating to university based cities, rather than recruit employees that will have to move to a location absent of creativity and the ability to dream about the future. His recent research indicates that creativity is a catalyst to creating wealth and success, when fostered by a supportive environment. Another keynote speaker, Mr. Claudio Sanchez, of MPR News, spoke on the need to break down the cycle of poverty, despair and gloom experienced by many minorities and disadvantaged, that attributes to lack of success in their higher educational experience. His hope and enthusiasm for this change is anchored in his statement that "education in the United States is a system of second, third, fourth, and fifth chances". He encouraged colleges and universities to continue to support and mentor those students who are at risk of dropping out due to their life situation.

The Fort Riley education staff members who attended the UCEA Conference were particularly impressed by the remarks by these two scholars. They were interested because the military is where many of these at-risk individuals go to "be all they can be". The military affords the opportunity for at-risk individuals to tap into their creativity and realize their dreams. The Army Continuing Education System catches many individuals that have fallen through the cracks and gives them the resources to succeed, enhancing their creativity. The military, as a whole, has provided soldiers steadfast encouragement to complete a college degree, regardless of their age, rank, or financial situation. The system provides basic skills needed to accomplish the military mission as well as college level work, tuition assistance and Veterans Administration funding, classes during on-duty and off-duty hours through a multitude of media, promotion and career incentives, and command support. The military offers all the tools needed for success in higher education. These tools are not present on the average college campus.

Investing the Time

The major dimension to leadership is its ethical commitment. An educational ethical commitment means mentoring and investing the time to ensure the success of students. Hence, as Fort Riley initiates eArmyU, students will be mentored in the design and development of their vision for professional development. They will be encouraged to become focused and passionate in guiding their own instructional program.

Currently underway, is a mentoring initiative that will bring together established military leaders, educators and scholars from the Fort Riley Consortium of Educators, and Fort Riley community at-large to serve as mentors. Mentoring will begin early so that students have an opportunity to

enhance their professional development by engaging in elective academic activities which are part of their educational and career program. This early assistance will truly aid an effective on-line technological oriented educational system.

A Time Proven Mentoring Program

Fort Riley's mentoring program will be modeled after a highly successful leadership program entitled "Collaborative Educational Programs for the Americas (CEPA)." CEPA is an innovative and bold leadership initiative with an emphasis on developing future instructional leaders through mentoring. CEPA is an initiative with emphasis on developing future leaders through partnerships among future leaders and current, established leaders. Graduate students in educational leadership, law enforcement, business, and other disciplines have an opportunity to collaborate with senior professional from universities, law enforcement, the military, business and industry, as well as civic and political leaders. CEPA is an outreach initiative for creating a cadre of qualified leaders for the new millennium.

Therefore, one of the most important principles that will also be embraced by Fort Riley is the investment of time, necessary to develop new leadership. This cannot be done fleetingly, but must be a conscientious effort. We must all make a "full-time" commitment to the intellectual development of our future leaders through a successful eArmyU mentoring initiative.

Motivating Fort Riley student-soldiers in their academic studies will affect the positive changes needed in the content and delivery of on-line technological instructional programs. Developing innovative, dynamic, and creative alternatives like eArmyU is crucial for attracting, preparing, and retaining soldiers who will evolve as the powerful young leaders of the future and for providing a strong foundation for effective military leadership.

The success of a "high technology learning/training environment" is attained through leadership and mentoring. It requires a true commitment.