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This paper discusses the Air Force Military Program Management career progression training gap. It explains the current training and certifications process. Then it looks at other Air Force career fields benchmarked advanced training schoolhouses. Finally, it makes the recommendation that in order to grow an elite cadre of Mid-Tier corps acquisition Program Managers, an advanced schoolhouse but be established. The acquisition workforce must keep up with the speed of its surrounding environment.

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MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

TITLE:

**ACQUISITION DOMAIN – ACHIEVING PROGRAM
MANAGEMENT DOMINANCE THROUGH ADVANCED TRAINING**

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Executive Summary

Title: Acquisition Domain – Achieving program management dominance through advanced training

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Thesis: The Department of Defense Acquisition Workforce (AWF) has identified the need to develop its professionals to meet the demand of the National Defense Strategy (NDS). In order to do so, they need to be better educated and more prepared to tackle evolving challenges discussed in the NDS. Currently there are only minimum certification standards that are required and tracked to prove qualification. Other Air Force career fields have developed mid-tier military advanced training programs to grow a corps of professionals charged with not only being the best at their profession, but subject matter experts (SME) for other professionals to turn to. The AWF for the Air Force should be afforded the same developmental opportunities as the other core competency functions. Through the creation of a curriculum and schoolhouse, the Air Force must develop a military advanced schoolhouse leveraging pre-existing structures, beginning with the Program Management career field (63A). After sufficient metrics evaluation, the Air Force could expand the school house to accommodate other Air Force AWF core competencies.

Discussion: In previous decades, the United States has been afforded the luxury of time when it came to its approach to defense acquisition. However, the current environment has never been more daunting when it comes to being in a technological race with near peer competitors. In order to maintain an asymmetrical advantage, the Air Force AWF needs to have an extremely competent and well-trained corps of professionals that understand the acquisition environment inside and out. There is a federally mandated training program established under the Defense Acquisition Workforce Improvement Act (DAWIA) which lays out prescribed minimum training and certification requirements for each element of the AWF. The community relies heavily on established regulations and limited training opportunities to expose the AWF numerous situations. However, in conjunction with Federal Regulations and mediocre training requirements, the Air Force AWF Corps is woefully under prepared to deftly tackle every acquisition that arises.

Conclusion: In order to enable the speed of relevance, the Air Force AWF must establish an advanced schoolhouse, to grow and breed a strong acquisition professional military core that is better educated, exposed to a broader spectrum, and more prepared to tackle the acquisition domain.

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Preface

As an Air Force Acquisition Program Manager, I have experienced the quality and quantity of education we receive in an attempt to expose and immerse us into the acquisition environment. I have always felt that there is a void in this academic structure and it is inadequate at preparing program managers to meet and exceed the demands of the evolutionary acquisition domain. It is my intent that with this paper to provide senior leaders in the acquisition career field with a recommendation to develop a mid-tier Advanced Acquisition Schoolhouse for program managers capable of growing a cadre of master professionals with the end-state of advancing the whole of the AWF.

Throughout my research I received guidance and input from fellow Air Force AWF members who expressed similar frustrations with the system. Additionally, it was my husband who inspired me to push past the status quo and attempt to reinvent “what right should look like” when it comes to quality training and education in the acquisition career field. My husband is a 2012 graduate of the United States Air Force Weapons School, Nellis AFB, NV and is currently serving as a Strategic Policy Fellow at the Pentagon.

INTRODUCTION

In previous decades, the United States has been afforded the luxury of time when it came to its approach to major defense acquisition programs. However, given the current environment, there has never been a more daunting task placed on the Acquisition Workforce (AWF) when it comes to being in a technological race with near-peer competitors. The DoD is wrought with complex security challenges and that have direct impacts on readiness, lethality, resilience, and adaptation. America no longer has a preordained right to victory.¹ In 2018, the Department of Defense (DOD) estimated that its 82 major defense acquisition programs would cost over \$1.69 trillion in total to acquire.² In aligning with one of the objectives from the National Defense Strategy (NDS), the AWF needs to be able to deliver performance while maintaining affordability and speed. It must be able to keep up with the evolving technology, culture, and mindset.³ In order to maintain an asymmetrical advantage and meet the demands placed on it by the NDS, the AWF needs to have an extremely competent and well-trained corps of professionals that understand and can navigate the acquisition environment inside and out. Moreover, with a newfound focus on speed, there is an inherent risk of leaning too far forward such that exquisite systems are acquired in a stovepipe of excellence due to not adequately addressing the aforementioned security and interoperability concerns. Acquisitions at the speed of relevance is an excellent tag-line, but the current DoD fleet is riddled with assets, taking years to acquire, yet have limited to no capacity to integrate. The only way to be successful is to train the AWF to be resilient, flexible, and adaptable to the future of warfare. While the DoD as a whole may be experiencing challenges maintaining the asymmetrical advantage, the AF AWF is completely missing the mark on adequately providing advanced training for mid-tier military acquisition Program Managers (PM) in order to groom high performing, credible, tacticians in

the acquisition domain. The Air Force must capitalize on benchmarked, proven advanced schoolhouses similar to other career fields in order to not be left in the dust. The Air Force PMs should be afforded the same developmental opportunities. Through the creation of a curriculum and establishment of an advanced acquisitions schoolhouse, the Air Force must follow suit by leveraging pre-existing facilities and infrastructures. These individuals must be selected based on their performance merits to attend a high intensity training school in order to refine and enhance the training that they have already received in order to be groomed into Subject Matter Experts (SME) and mentors in their functional area. The goal is to return these individuals to their units and require them to perform a mentor/SME role.

This paper will discuss how the AWF is organized, how training is mandated/established, followed by what the current Air Force methodology is for certifications. This study will not evaluate or make recommendations for changes to the standard core DAWIA training certifications for the Air Force. Instead, this paper will focus specifically on the PM core function (63A Air Force Specialty Code (AFSC)), one of 15 core Acquisition specialties. The predominant reason is the PM career field encompasses a “cradle to grave” knowledge base that is vast and their scope of responsible is immense. Establishing an advanced schoolhouse for this career field will augment and amplify the existing training, ultimately paying dividends when it comes to influencing the future of major weapons systems. The argument will also only address the military individuals serving as Program Managers. The demand that is required is high-intensity training but also part of an extensive career progression/delineation of an individual over their military peers. These individuals will be required to perform at a higher caliber than their peers, and their future assignments will be tailored to leverage

their advanced knowledge base. After sufficient metrics and evaluation, the curriculum could be expanded to other military core acquisition functions such as Engineering (62E AFSC) or Contracting (64P AFSC). This paper will review two existing Air Force advanced schoolhouse to evaluate why their programs were established. The schoolhouses benchmarked processes and lessons learned will be used to prepare what a PM school house could look like and how graduate management should be executed.

Obtaining quality and competent AWF personnel has been a challenging task historically. It was highlighted in 1990 when the DoD went through multiple embarrassing acquisition programs that were wrought with cost and schedule overruns, realizing there was not enough oversight in the management of the acquisition community. Because of these incidents, the Congress enacted the Defense Acquisition Workforce Improvement Act (DAWIA) into public law which laid out prescribed minimum training and certification requirements for each element of the acquisition workforce.⁴ In 2008, The DoD reinvigorated the acquisition community with the creation of the Defense Acquisition Workforce Development Fund (DAWDF). DAWDF is a federally mandated monetary fund as well as a program responsible for outlining and evaluating the recruitment, training, and retention of the AWF.⁵ The DoD then allows each component some leeway when it comes to execution after approval. The AWF community relies heavily on these established certification requirements and uses the awarding of certification levels as a metric of achievement for training the workforce. While this training is sufficient for establishing a training and certification baseline for the whole AWF, when it comes to the Air Force specifically, there is a clear gap in developing a high performing mid-tier corps of individuals.

DEFENSE ACQUISITION WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT FUND (DAWDF)

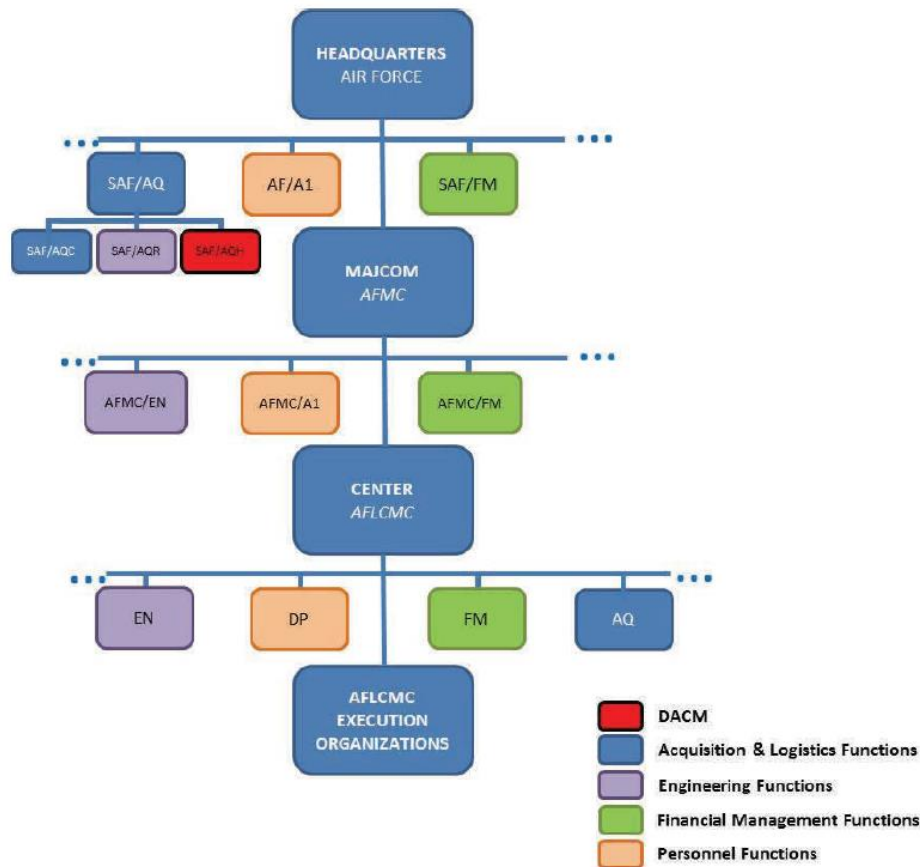
To understand how a military AF PM advanced schoolhouse would benefit the larger AWF picture, the whole DoD Acquisition apparatus must be understood to know how to change it. In 2008, the DoD identified a need to invest more in the AWF because the speed, demand, and complexity of acquisitions was changing at a rapid pace. Through a National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), a DAWDF, also known as “Section 852 Funding” was created to assist in the recruitment, training, and retention of DoD acquisition personnel.⁶ DAWDF is now codified under Title 10 United States Code (U.S.C.) Chapter 87, Section 1705. DAWDFs goal is to ensure personnel can properly perform their mission, provide appropriate oversight of contractor performance, and ensure that DoD receives the best value for taxpayer dollars.⁷ The fund is financed by a combination of direct appropriations and funds provided by military departments and defense agencies.⁸

The Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisitions Technology & Logistics (USD/AT&L) is responsible for DAWDF management and implementation, however, the USDAT&L can appoint a fund manager to assume responsibility.⁹ Defense Acquisition University (DAU) was the first organization to receive the appointment as fund manager, however, in 2011, responsibility was transferred to the Director of Human Capital Initiatives (HCI) in the Office of USD/AT&L and still retains it today.¹⁰

Each component then appoints a Director of Acquisition Career Management (DACM) to serve as focal points for their components in DAWDF matters. For the Air Force, the DACM is a GS-15. The Air Force has established two offices for the day-to-day management and

execution of their DAWDF program, the Acquisition Professional Development Program (APDP) (SAF/AQH) and DAWDF Operations Division (SAF/AQHA). Additionally, the Air Force has a DAWDF resource manager. The DAWDF Program Manager and resource manager must work in close coordination to ensure the development, execution, and management of their spend plans are distributed appropriately. For the Air Force DACM, DAWDF is a challenge because of the countless organizations involved in the development of the AWF.¹¹ Figure 1 below is a simplified depiction of the Air Force's acquisition organizational structure, focusing on one major command (MAJCOM)—Air Force Materiel Command (AFMC). There must be a balance of goals and priorities between the functional needs (Program management, engineering, etc.), the A1 Manpower needs, Financial management/budget constraints, and Acquisition goals.¹²

Figure 1. Simplified AF Acquisition Organizational Structure¹³



Note: Above is a simplified Organizational Structure for the Air Force Materiel Command. Intent is to illustrate that not only are there multiple hierarchical levels, but there are also stakeholders at each level. At each level and in each office, they have competing and sometimes conflicting priorities when it comes to what should be advocated for when it comes to training.

Every year, the DAWDF program stresses the continuance of funding in order to:¹⁴

- Support the intent of the DAWIA
- Help fulfill planning requirements that are described in strategic workforce plans
- Enable accomplishment of qualification and career path requirements
- Support strategic objectives to achieve greater efficiency and productivity in defense spending
- Enable the acquisition workforce to help modernize and reset the U.S military force, improve acquisition outcomes, and ensure technological superiority for the future.

In 2017 the total DoD DAWDF fund was \$579M, the Air Force received \$69M or 13% of the overall budget.¹⁵ When speaking specifically to using the funding for training and career path requirements, DAWDF can and should be used to “jump-start” initiatives in advance of permanent programmed funding brought in through the Program Objective Memorandum

process.¹⁶ This incentivizes organizations to think creatively and push faster when it comes to addressing and getting after identified deficiencies or gaps. DAWDF releases an annual call from organizations to push forward their ideas. However, a RAND Study from 2016 identified that there was a communication gap between the DAWDF office down to the lowest organizational levels. The study also identified that the submissions that were coming forward were from a local viewpoint versus conveying a solution of strategic importance for either their function or MAJCOM.¹⁷ If organizations desire to use the DAWDF funds, they must submit a formal proposal that includes a detailed description of the initiative, execution plan, and its direct link to the strategic workforce objectives.¹⁸ The list below breakdowns the exact items needed for the proposal. In order to present a recommendation for an Advanced Acquisition Schoolhouse, a submission would have to be made through the annual data call and include the specific items below.

DAWDF Initiative Proposal Submission Requirements:¹⁹

- A detailed description of what the funds are being used for
- The target workforce
- Expected outcomes or return on investment
- A description of metrics and reporting that will show how the return on investment will be determined (The requester is responsible for describing the data source that is being used to justify the need for the program and how the success of the program will be measured.)
- The assumptions used to formulate estimated cost of the proposal
- A description of alternatives considered to show the initiative represents the best way to solve the problem
- An explanation of why DAWDF funding is requested instead of MAJCOM operation and maintenance (O&M) or other funding
- A five-year funding profile
- Plan for transition to O&M funding

ACQUISITION WORKFORCE STRATEGIC GOALS

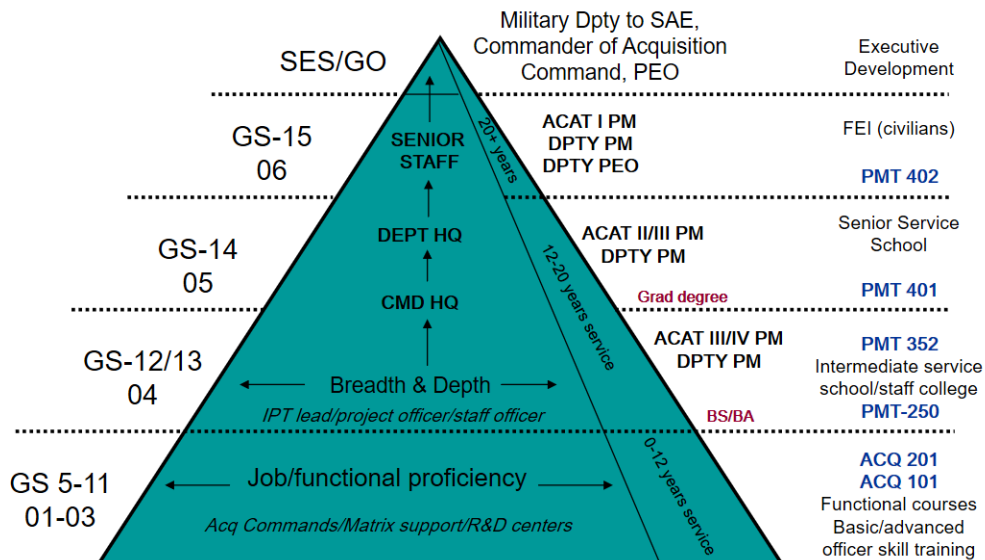
To address the findings from the 2016 RAND report regarding lack of alignment with strategic acquisition workforce goals, a DAWDF proposal must explain how the creation of the advanced acquisition schoolhouse will benefit either the functional community, service component or a MAJCOM.²⁰ The current DoD Acquisition Workforce Strategic Plan (AWFSP) (FY2016 – FY2021) details the priorities to sustain the momentum of efforts to strengthen the defense acquisition workforce. The plan also addresses the “challenging and unpredictable future that requires the military to be equipped and ready to respond to threats posed by a diverse set of adversaries, from traditional nation-states to regional insurgencies by non-state actors.”²¹ The DoD also needs to ensure the ability to maintain a dominant warfighting capability. To do this requires an agile and high-performing AWF ready to successfully acquire, deploy, and maintain state-of-the-art weapon and information systems.²² The DoD level goals are Goal 1: Make the Department of Defense and employer of Choice, Goal 2: Shape the Acquisition Workforce to achieve current and future acquisition requirements, Goal 3: Improve the quality and professionalism of the Acquisition Workforce, and Goal 4: Continuously improve Workforce policies, programs, and processes.²³ However, only Goals 2-4 are applicable to being addressed with an advanced schoolhouse proposal.

Goal 2 explains that decisive action must be taken to ensure professionals have the knowledge, skills, experience, and capabilities to be future leaders of organizations; more specifically, management of military acquisition careers and development of skills at all levels.²⁴ Goal 3 describes shaping individuals for the future of acquisition learning, being able to adapt to the changing environment of integrated information delivery; more specifically, providing world-class training to meet the needs of an increasingly complex environment.²⁵ Finally, Goal

4 discusses the need to continuously improve, predominately through statutory flexibility and talent management.²⁶

The AWFSP goes on to address component and functional specific goals. The plan re-emphasizes the Air Forces' ability to deliberately develop military and civilian acquisition professional IAW well-defined career path models.²⁷ A sample 63A PM Career Pyramid is shown in Figure 2. These career models layout opportunities and experiences for acquisition professionals at all ranks.

Figure 2. PM Career Path²⁸



Note: The PM Career Path Pyramid was created to visually convey the evolution for both Military and Civilian Program Managers. On the left is the Military/Civilian rank comparison. All the way to the right lists the major DAU training classes commensurate with that rank level. On the right is also the expected duty titles and degree requirements. Inside the pyramid explains the operating levels that would be associated with the ranks.

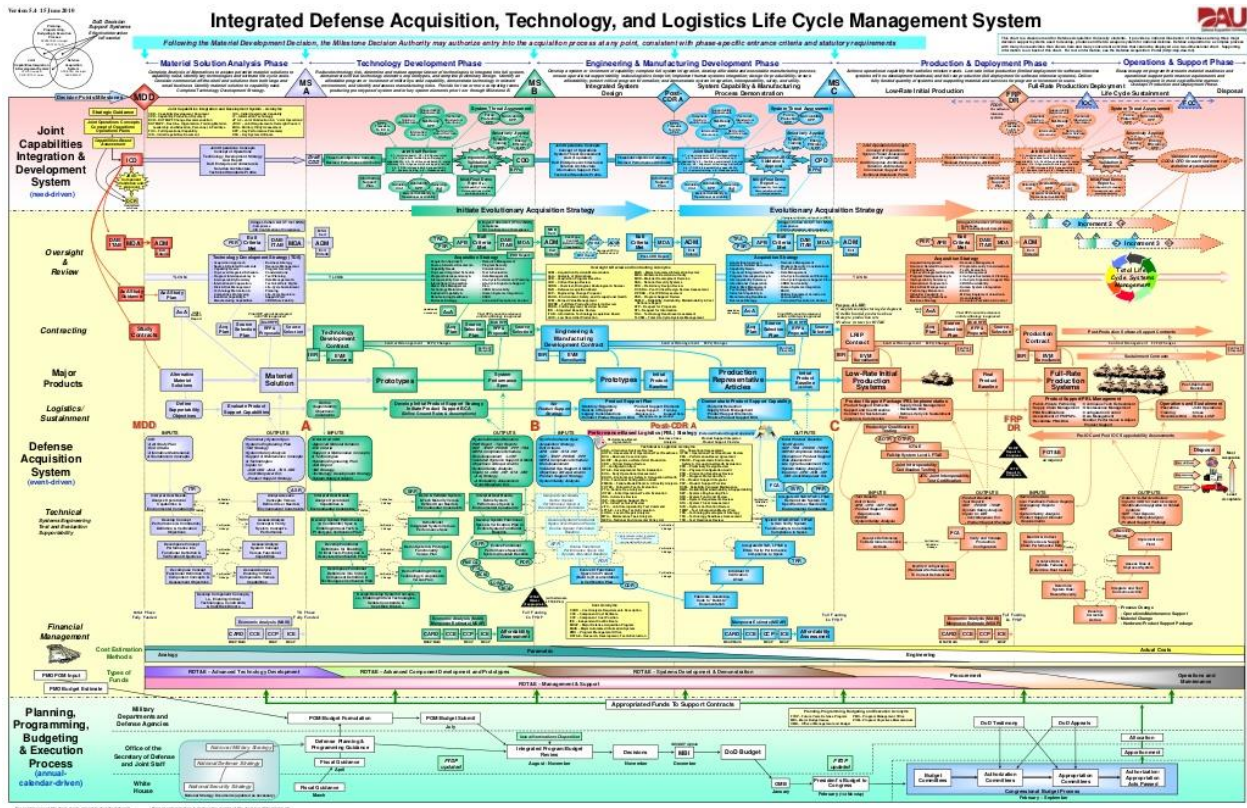
The AFWSP explains the immense scope of responsibilities that fall on the Program Management function. PMs are solely responsible for the efficient and effective integration of all efforts and resources needed for the successful development, testing, acquisition, sustainment, management, and demilitarization of major weapon systems, service, or other equipment and support systems. PMs are involved in all phases of a program's lifecycle and must be skilled in

multiple disciplines, including leadership, contracting, cost estimating, systems engineering, science and technology, life cycle logistics, test and evaluation, and information management and technology, to name just a few.²⁹ The vastness in terms of phases of the lifecycle with which a PM could very well experience can be visually seen in the daunting Integrated Defense Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics Life Cycle Management System Chart below, Figure 3. The PM functional leader, Mr. James MacStravic has listed the top three challenges for its future that it is working on:

- The Need to Continuously Improve Training³⁰
- The Need for Stronger Qualification Requirements³¹
- The Need to Leverage the Experience and Knowledge of Proven Performers³²

The PM functional recognizes the increased complexity of the systems and services procured will require continuous updates and enhancements to training materials and processes. They also recognize that the training levels are not perfect and will continue to hone the qualification requirements. Finally, the most important and relevant to the discussion of necessity to creating an advanced acquisition PM schoolhouse is educating and creating an elite corps of Acquisition PMs at an advanced level. They will be capable of absorbing not only the baseline acquisition processes and requirements, but the additional critical skillsets needed to navigate the dynamic and demanding 21st century acquisition environment. These are skillsets that not every PM will be capable of digesting at such a rapid pace. Those that are capable are expected to translate, train, and mentor other AWF personnel in their program offices to which they return.

Figure 3. Integrate Defense Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics Life Cycle Management System³³



Note: The Integrate Defense Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics Life Cycle Management System, sometimes referred to as the “wall chart” is an attempt to consolidate numerous facets of the “cradle to grave” acquisition realm. It lists the Phases, decision milestones, required documents, mandatory meetings, financial management milestones, and so on.

CURRENT STATE OF AIR FORCE ACQUISITION TRAINING

“Defense acquisition professionals have a special body of knowledge and experience that is not easily acquired...No one should expect an amateur without acquisition experience to be able to exercise professional judgments in acquisition without the years of training and experience it takes to learn the field...our expertise sets us apart.” — Frank Kendall | USDAT&L, 2014³⁴

CERTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS

As Dr. Kendall eloquently puts it, training and experience are paramount to the development of the acquisition corps. The DoD recognizes the importance of making sure the AWF is trained to certification standards, which is why DAWIA was created. DAWIA established the career field guides which represent the most current career field certification

standards for each career field/path and Level (I, II, or III). DAWIA certification standards are comprised of three mandatory requirements; training, experience, and education.³⁵

Historically, DAU has been the primary training organization for the Defense Acquisition Workforce. While DAU conducts the training, it does not certify nor does it approve certification applications. Certification falls to the Defense AWF functional leader who verifies that all the commensurate requirements have been met (in this case, the Program Management function leader). Formal certification then falls to the responsibility of the Air Forces' DACM who makes the final determination as to whether the individual has met all the criteria required.³⁶ To determine what certification type and level an individual must obtain is determined by how the manning position they are in is coded. For example, an Air Force Captain could be sitting in position #JJ129495R, which is coded to be A/2, meaning they have to achieve a PM Level II Certification within two years of being assigned along with the training courses, degree, and experience.³⁷

The core training classes for the DAWIA Certifications are predominately taught in a distance learning (DL), computer-based training (CBT) delivery method, however, there are a few classes that are directed to be instructed via in-residence.³⁸ The chosen methodology for evaluating a participant's understanding of the material for the DL courses is an end of course exam. The rigor of the exams is woefully lacking based on the number of attempts allowed to pass.

On top of the DAWIA Certification Standards the Air Force adheres to the Continuous Learning Point (CLP) system under DoDI 5000.66. The CLP systems is intended on ensuring that even if someone was complete with their appropriate level of certifications, they must continue to find ways to "educate" themselves.³⁹ This is defined broadly and includes learning

about new acquisition methods, technology advancements, staying abreast of changes in a career field, broadening experience or expanding technical expertise, etc. The scope of what counts for points under the CLP program is wide-ended. The requirement is to achieve 80 CLP points over two years in order to remain in an acquisition position. The accomplishment of the path to achieving these points is done in collaboration with the members' supervisor. Ideally, the member meets with their supervisor to lay out a plan spanning two years on how to achieve the 80 points.⁴⁰ This does not mean that to obtain the points they have to attend an in-residence course or complete a DL course. Most AWF members participate in a combination of continuous learning activities that fall into four categories; training, education, experience, or professional. Training encompasses classes required for DAWIA Certification and any class taught by DAU or Air Force Institute of Technology (AFIT). Under the Education category, a member could report any classwork they are taking towards a higher learning institution. There are pre-established guidelines for the value of a class in CLPs. Under Experience, a member could report any broadening assignment or rotation. They could also report participation in an Integrated Product Team that is outside the normal duty position. Finally, under the Professional category, a member could track participation in workshops, professional licensing, attending or speaking at a professional conference, or even teaching and mentoring their colleagues on a topic or skill.

Each DoD component is responsible for execution of their program and determines how they are recorded and tracked.⁴¹ The Air Force uses a program called AcqNow.⁴² The established metric that is communicated to senior leadership is based on a percentage of personnel that achieved or did not achieved the CLP requirement over each period. However, currently there is no established metric which determines whether the additional training that was

received was beneficial or not to the members' career objectives. Additionally, there are problems with the accumulation and calculation of the CLPS. Once 80 points are accumulated, the remaining points are lost, they are not carried over to the next period. Also, once 80 points are accumulated, the two year period restarts, regardless if it took one month to get 80 points or two full years. To put it into perspective, each point is meant to be one “contact hour.” Therefore, a person could attend a one week in-residence course and it would account for 40 points.

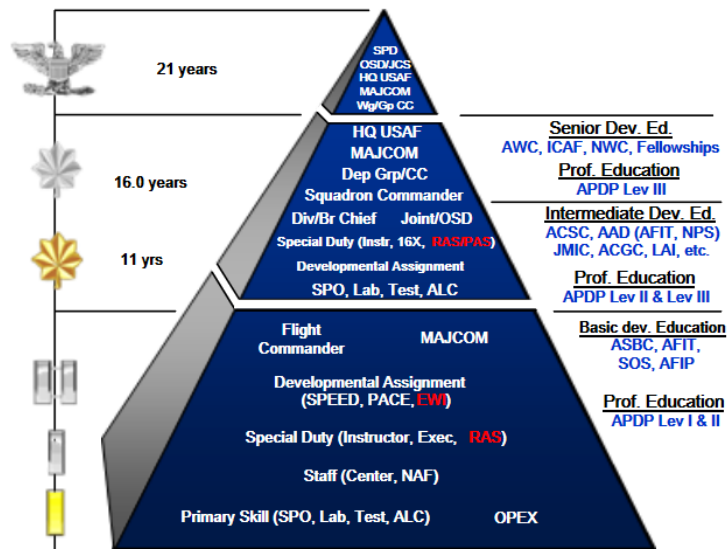
One of the most significant problems with the training and certifications required by DAWIA is that these are “the minimum” required to hold that acquisition position. Therefore, except having to accomplish CLPs every two years, there are no incentives or opportunities to receive more advanced acquisition training. For example, if you are a mid-level Air Force Captain, and you had completed all the Level II training requirements, you are not allowed to take Level III courses because you are not in a higher coded position. Restraints have been instituted predominately due to funding limitations and prioritization of other individuals in order to meet their minimum certification standards. Therefore, even if this Captain wanted and was completely capable of receiving higher level advanced training, it is forbidden until much later in their career. The Air Force is unintentionally stunting the professional growth of its own AWF.

CAREER FIELD EDUCATION AND TRAINING PLAN

On top of all of the DAWIA Certification training and mandatory CLPs, the Air Force career functional managers developed a document to help supervisors guide their members through a “training roadmap.”⁴³ The Career Field Education and Training Plan (CFETP), specifically the one for 63A’s (Military PMs) and 1101’s (Civilian PMs), discusses what a

normal career progression would look like, to include the criteria for awarding the basic, senior and master functional badges. The career field functional managers have also prepared a visual “pyramid progression” of what a 63A officer would/could experience (Figure 4).

Figure 4. 63A Career Pyramid⁴⁴



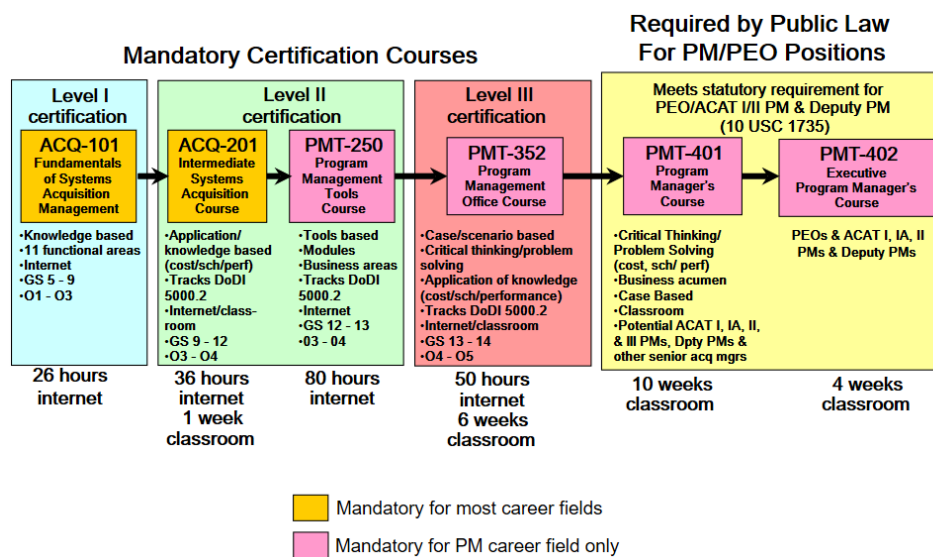
Note: The 63A career pyramid above is focused on the expected Air Force military progression for a PM. On the left is rank and on the right is APDP Level, developmental education, and additional programs. Inside the pyramid, it lists the potential opportunities that would be commensurate with rank that can be with the career field and outside.

The fundamental skills school that every 61/62/63 military accession attends is ‘Fundamentals of Acquisition Management,’ a four-week course at Wright Patterson AFB.⁴⁵ The CFETP is a beneficial document when it comes to explaining what an acquisition professional career could look like. The CFETP identifies core and non-core tasks that should be accomplished within the first three assignments. These tasks are an exhaustive listing of what every acquisition officer should be skilled at or at a minimum, exposed to.⁴⁶

The challenge with these tasks are 63A and 1101s assignments could vary so much in what their job requires of them that they would never have the opportunity to experience 3/4th of the core tasks. An 8-year Air Force captain could spend their whole career in test program

offices and only learn about the other facets of acquisitions via DL classes. A cascading effect of the overwhelming amount of expected training is becoming numb to what they are learning. A common theme amongst CBTs is students “clicking through just to get them done.” This is a problem when a predominate amount of the required training for certification is delivered via DL as noted in Figure 5. Additionally, while the CFETP is described as a mandatory document, it is not unheard of if a supervisor does not accomplish one for their rates. The last time the CFETP was updated was August 2012, yet there have been enormous overhaul changes to the regulations and statues in the acquisition environment since that time.

Figure 5. Program Management Career Track⁴⁷



Note: The Program Management Career Track above aligns DAU training courses with levels of certifications, skills achieved at each level. Below the level blocks is broken out to the training commitment.

ADDITIONAL ACQUISITION PROGRAMS

The Air Force has recognized the fact that CFETPs are lacking and therefore has developed numerous programs that attempt to get after some specialty training. Unfortunately, these band-aid programs all still miss the mark because they fail to provide valuable or tangible

benefit to the whole AWF. Some examples of the programs are Advanced Tactical Acquisition Corps (ATAC), Ghost Deployment Program, and Strategic Acquisition Leadership Team (SALT).

The ATAC program is based at the Air Force Life Cycle Management Center (AFLCMC) in Wright Patterson Air Force Base (AFB), OH and began in 2016. The vision of ATAC is to groom the next generation of Air Force Acquisition Leaders. ATAC selects a team of seven junior military and civilian acquisition professionals twice a year from a group of nominees in the following backgrounds: PM, Logistics, Contracting, and Finance. Over three months the team members attend leadership courses and attempt to solve a critical Air Force acquisition challenge. The first class attempted to solve the lack of a process to attest to whether programs are executable for Defense Business Systems (DBS). The culminating activity of the program was to present their findings to the Air Force Material Commander and other senior stakeholders. The team members were also afforded mentorship opportunities from numerous senior military, government, and private industry leaders.⁴⁸ The primary issue with the ATAC program is the experience that is provided only benefits the team of seven. The training is focused on only making the individuals better versus making the whole AWF better. The team members have no accountability back to the community.

The Ghost Deployment Program is owned by United States Special Operations Command out of MacDill AFB, FL and was established in 2009. This program accepts nominations from First Lieutenants and Captains in the 6X AFSCs. The program is designed to immerse a small group of Company Grade Officers (CGOs) into a specific SOCOM environment with title 10 authorities. Their mission is to help deliver Special Operations Forces (SOF) capabilities to the warfighter. The program is approximately six months long and is intended to

culminate with a deployment as a Liaison Officer (LNO) to an OCONUS SOF Operating location.⁴⁹ While this program does try and assign the member to a follow-on assignment in SOCOM post-program participation, there is again, no responsibility for those members to return to the regular acquisition community to train or mentor fellow AWF personnel. This program is predominately focused on the betterment of SOCOM.

SALT was recently established in 2018 at AFLCMC in Wright Patterson AFB, OH. SALT is targeted towards mid-level employees solely at AFLCMC and includes 65 hours of academic curriculum over three months for ten acquisition personnel. This program is designed to help employees' transition from technical experts to leadership positions. The program attempts to help individuals solve real-world acquisition challenges in their current organization but also provides them with tools to be future supervisors. The program culminates with an out brief of their findings and recommendations.⁵⁰ The issues with this program are that it is only located at AFLCMC, it is predominately focused on solving a supervisory transition problem, and again, there is no pay-back to the AWF.

After reviewing the existing programs that have been initiated by the Air Force, it is clear that there is a gap when it comes to affording mid-grade acquisition officers advanced training opportunities. By not having such training, it is in turn affecting the larger AWF by not growing its high performing officers.

EXISTING AIR FORCE ADVANCED SCHOOLHOUSE TRAINING

Within the CFETP, there are established milestones focused on a tiered approach to individual development. What is missing from the Acquisition CFETP is a deliberate leveraging of high performers at the second assignment, mid-tier, six to eight-year mark. This is a vital

point in an PMs career in which they may have been exposed to multiple facets of the acquisition lifecycle, completed basic development education requirements and begun to stand out as leaders and high performers among their peers.

In contrast, the Air Force developed intermediate level programs focused on grooming an elite cadre of Officers and Enlisted professionals in the Combat Air Force (CAF), Mobility Air Force (MAF), Global Strike, and SOF. The majority of these specialties are represented within the 57th Wing at Nellis AFB, NV. Two such programs that can be evaluated and benchmarked are the US Air Force Weapons School (USAFWS) and the Advanced Sortie Production Course (ASPC) within the Advanced Maintenance and Munitions Operations School (AMMOS). The former traces its roots to post-Vietnam War tactics development and has had over forty years to refine syllabus development, candidate selection, as well as graduate management. The latter is the newest advanced course for the Air Force at just under three years of operation (post curriculum/school refinement). Comparing these programs from initial establishment to current configuration will shed light on lessons learned from which the AWF can build a departure point for an advanced acquisition course curriculum. Furthermore, the USAFWS built a benchmarked strategy for graduate management in order to ensure 1) payback to the Air Force for the investment and 2) building a Weapons Officer does not stop at graduation.

The USAFWS is a six-month course that produces Weapons Officers and Enlisted experts with “the knowledge, technical expertise, cognitive skills, leadership ability and officership traits required to be a commander’s primary tactical advisor, problem solver, and unit mentor.”⁵¹ A common misconception about the USAFWS is that candidates attend in order to become the best within their respective profession. In reality, the mission statement for the USAFWS is “to train expert instructors and leaders skilled in the art and science of integrated

battlespace dominance across all domains.”⁵² The emphasis is placed on formal instructors and leaders; those individuals with the right blend of competency and capacity to teach and lead. Additionally, the course is designed not just to teach others how to be proficient, but also integrate joint and coalition assets.⁵³

The ASPC in the AMMOS, is a 13-week course “providing students with in-depth instruction on how to use assigned people, processes and resources to maximize mission execution and increase sortie production capabilities.”⁵⁴ Just as USAFWS graduates, ASPC graduates are charged with “effectively sharing their knowledge” as a tactical advisor to peers, subordinates, and wing leadership. Again, the consistent theme is an individual who is recognized as an expert in their respective career field, but who also possesses the ability to teach and is expected to do so.

FUTURE STATE OF ADVANCED PROGRAM MANAGER SCHOOLHOUSE

There are three critical components to establishing a flourishing schoolhouse process. The first would be to set the baseline criteria for candidate selection. This would include career timing, objective, and subjective criteria, and the subjective criteria should come from prior school graduates. The next step is to develop a curriculum that is robust, rigorous, and operationally focused. The USAFWS auditing and vetting process has been historically difficult to get approval for a new curriculum, and even after approval, there may still be refinement that is required. The final step is to establish a process that manages graduates’ careers not only for their progression but the best placement for them to have the greatest impact on the AF AWF.

CANDIDATE SELECTION

Knowledge, technical expertise, cognitive skills, leadership ability, and officership are the traits candidates are evaluated against. It is essential to understand how these candidates are groomed to meet the objective and subjective criteria used to vet candidates for advanced schoolhouses. Objective criteria for candidate selection should be based off tangible career milestones. For example, to evaluate an individual's officership, a review panel weighs the scope and responsibility of jobs held within the unit. Flight Commander/Shop Chief = two points, Assistant Flight Commander/Deputy Shop Chief one point, no formal leadership duty title = zero points.⁵⁵ The corollary for the AWF would be Program Manager = three pts, Deputy Program Manager = 2 pts, Project Manager = 1pt. To objectively address tactical expertise, the panel looks to timeline and status of qualifications and certifications. Did one candidate become an instructor on an accelerated timeline, fail any evaluations, or possess certifications that distinguish them amongst peers?⁵⁶ For the AWF, this would leverage the existing architecture within DAU and incentivize individuals to go beyond minimum progression standards. Establishing subjective criteria will be a challenge for the AF AWF while the course is in infancy. Until an initial wave of graduates are placed in Program Offices to help vet candidates, subjective inputs can fall victim to the senior ranking officer in their chain of command. Senior raters may not be the best advocates for identifying the best criteria in a candidate. To mitigate the initial subjectivity issue, functionals should work directly with the initial schoolhouse cadre to ensure graduates are prioritized to acquisition bases/offices with the largest pool of candidates post-graduation. This subjective portion of grading is where graduates speak on behalf of their experience with a candidate. Have they observed others seeking this individuals' advice out and is this individual incredibly capable and smart? Is this person capable, but has a personality flaw

fixable with a direct intervention? Fleshing out an applicant's potential may prove difficult for a community that does not historically work outside of their portfolio in the formidable years. A PM may work and excel for eight years under a missile subsystem portfolio. Does past success with missiles indicate future success managing a tanker portfolio? Having an in-house graduate who has been exposed to various requirements will help, but the AWF must build a network of TDY opportunities aimed purely at increasing the breadth of exposure for junior acquisition professionals.⁵⁷ Competition to attend the semi-annual advanced acquisition schoolhouse would be challenging. Based on the December 2018 AFPC provided 63A CGO manning numbers, there are 656 Lieutenants and 694 Captains that would fall into the "eligible to apply" category.⁵⁸ Baselineing from the average career field class size that currently goes through USAFWS, the recommended number of CGOs would be approximately eight per class. Historically, there is also a relatively high washout rate because of the rigor associated with the curriculum.⁵⁹

CURRICULUM

Within the curriculum, there must be a re-baselineing period where all the previous training that had been received via the DAU courses are evaluated for competency. This includes lifecycle phases, milestone decisions, budgeting processes, statutes, regulations, and so on. There must also be a portion of the curriculum that is focused on navigating the bureaucratic red tape that is associated with major weapons systems acquisitions programs. This demand on acquiring assets faster, but with less risk is a critical skillset for the AWF today that is challenging to comprehend, but would pay dividends to grasp and bring back to a program office. Finally, just the ability to sit in on, listen, and ask questions to the operators during critical missions, both during planning and debrief would be crucial. It would allow PMs to

begin to learn the language, terminology, requirements, capabilities, and challenges that operators face, but sometimes have a hard time translating into requirements for future acquisitions.

GRADUATE MANAGEMENT

Consider a sample career progression through Materiel Leader/Squadron Commander for both a high performing 63A Acquisition Officer as well as 13B Air Battle Manager, Table 1.

The gap in the intermediate development of 63As focused on exposing the individual to reap the rewards purely for the acquisition community.

Table 1. Sample Career Progression of high potential USAF 63A and 13B Officers⁶⁰⁶¹

63A			TAFSCD	13B		
Position	Training Requirement	Optional Development		Position	Training Requirement	Optional Development
Student	4 weeks, Initial accession		<12 months	Student	9 months, Undergraduate Pipeline	
Project Manager	26 hrs CBTs	AFIT	1-2 years	Student	12 months, Initial Qual Training	
Deputy PM	36 hrs CBTs, 40 hrs in-res	DAWIA	3-4 years	ABM, Air Weapons Officer	~2 years	Exercises, Deployments
		Ghost Deployment	5-6 years	Student	~4 mos, academic/flight testing	USN Top Gun, USMC WTI
PM			7-8 years	Instructor		USAF Weapons School
		SALT/ATAC	9-10 years	Chief of Sq/Wg Tactics/ADO	N/A	Exercises, Deployments
Student	12-18 mos	IDE	11-12 years	Student	12-18 mos	IDE
PM			13-14 years	Director of Operations		
Materiel Leader			15-16 years	Squadron Commander		

Note: The table above uses the Total Active Federal Commissioned Service Date (TAFSCD) as the middle line for comparison between the 63A career field and the 13B (Air Battle Management) career field. The table attempts to show correlation between how an “operational” career field manages a person’s career for someone of high caliber and how there is lack of development for the “non-operational” career field.

A major limiting factor to AF AWF progression is no formal directive or methodology to deliberately pair high performing acquisition PMs to positions. High performers are generally paired to positions through functional managers primarily based on supervisor input. This process yields variations as to the caliber of person a Commander would receive; it could be a top-notch performer, or it could just be an average worker who happened to work for an influential boss. Establishment of a mid-tier advanced acquisitions course complimented by a deliberate graduate management program will set a baseline as to what Commanders can expect. It will dictate a threshold as to the caliber of individual that a sophisticated program demands. In other words, it puts objective criteria into the generic statement “I need a really strong person for this job.”

In order to ensure payback for the Air Force’s investment into graduates of the USAFWS, the Air Force places a “W” prefix to an Officers primary AFSC. No matter the duty AFSC, this prefix stays with an individual as an indicator of potential tasking or hiring authority.⁶² Alternatively, some schools provide a Special Experience Identifier (SEI) which is an indicator that a person has met a certain level of experience in a platform or environment. The downside is just because a person has an SEI, doesn’t mean they are a SME in that field.⁶³ Therefore, a “W” type prefix should be implemented to identify officers in the AWF post-graduate phase to allow for succinct management.

Once a “W” prefix is awarded, the Air Force has established a policy to manage the placement of graduates. Air Force Instruction 11-415 prescribes the formation of a weapons shop, determines personnel composition and dictates what positions graduates may fill. A Tier 1 Weapons Officer (USAFWS graduate, ~7 years TAFSCD) is responsible for ensuring combat capability for operations at the squadron level for three years.⁶⁴ In parallel, a PM would serve as

the “Tactical” expert in the Program Officer they return to. They would be required to conduct local training and imparting their knowledge and experience on the junior military and civilian PM workforce. To use the levels of war analogy, a Tier 2 Weapons Officer (~10 years TAFSCD) moves from the tactical to the operational level of building combat capability for approximately two years. The focus can be on whole squadron training, exercise schedule, etc. Alternatively, a Tier 2 can also return to the schoolhouse as a formal instructor.⁶⁵ A PM advanced graduate serving in Tier 2 time could serve in a “Tactics” type shop at the Directorate level with which they are responsible for training more than just 1 Program Office and manage the Tier 1 officers below them.

The USAF writ large embraced the concept that in order to defeat a peer adversary we need more than just competent operators. At ASPCs inception, then Commander of Air Combat Command Gen Hawk Carlisle commented: "The talented patch wearers graduating from ASPC will work side by side with their ops-patch wearers to fill this (readiness) gap."⁶⁶ The intent is not to give a graduation patch to everyone. Instead it is to establish a recognized corps of elite individuals across the spectrum of specialties who can work both within their sphere of influence as well as merge others.

Take the previous example of the maintenance and operations patch wearers working together and insert a graduate of the acquisition advanced course discussing operational requirements. The result is a conversation that genuinely spans cradle to grave from emerging threat to risk assessment, operational need, source selection, spares provisioning, sustainment plan of action, testing, fully operational capable, to realistic timelines to feed jets/systems/etc. back to the fight.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

On April 23, 2019, AFMC published an article through its public affairs office announcing its plan to allow AF Acquisition Officers to attend the USAFWS at Nellis AFB, NV to serve as pathfinders for a new acquisition advanced instructor course. Their goal is to “leverage portions of the existing Weapons School curriculum and receive vigorous specialized acquisition tactics and procedures training while working and training with combat operators specializing in just about every weapons system in the Air Force fleet.” They envision that graduates will be embedded at the PEO/Wing level, AFWERX, and MAJCOM offices where they will teach and impart their acquisition weapons and tactics knowledge. Finally, Lt Gen McMurry, Commander, Air Force Life Cycle Management Center explains “It will provide an extraordinary level of integration with peer operators and a chance for acquisition professionals early in their career to get an unparalleled understanding of Air Force operations.”⁶⁷

With this development, it is clear that the Acquisition community agrees that there is a training/education gap in the CGO community that must be addressed. However, the same day, Colonel Steve Behmer, USAFWS Commandant posted to the “USAF Weapons School”

Facebook page the following information:

“Weapons School Graduates-
I have become aware that Air Force Material Command (AFMC) has published an article regarding a future Acquisitions Weapons School. Unfortunately, this article was not coordinated with The United States Air Force Weapons School. AFI 11-415 details the requirements and rigor required to establish a Weapons Instructor Course. Rest assured, that if the Acquisition’s community wants to establish a Weapons School, they will be held to the same standards as all other WICs.
-Col Steve Behmer, Commandant”⁶⁸

The comments from the commandant articulate that the AFMC article might have been misleading or misguided in its description of how mature the course curriculum is and whether it has sufficiently met the rigorous requirements of Air Force Instruction (AFI) 11-415. Therefore,

further pursuit towards refinement, validation, and establishment of an advanced acquisition instructor course should be a priority.

CONCLUSIONS/FUTURE RESEARCH CARRYOVER

The US has evolved from geographic domains of air, land, and sea to a combination of geographic with functional domains such as cyber, information, human, etc. Going forward, the DoD must be prepared to expand their consideration of warfighting domains. Keep it simple; if one can achieve a competitive advantage, it is a domain.

Case in point, the United States is outpaced by China's capacity to produce next-generation technology on an ever-increasing scope and scale. While some of this can be attributed to differences in the legal treatment of intellectual property and the relationships between government and industry, the US can no longer continue the status quo approach to acquisitions and expect to retain a competitive military advantage. Speed is a tagline; efficiency is what we need.

An elite cadre of professionals groomed from their entrance into the Air Force, hand selected to attend the most rigorous training is what will regain the US competitive advantage. Given the recent developments in the Air Force Acquisition PM training arena, it is clear that the Air Force wants to invest in its personnel, training, and equipment. There are still hurdles to overcome regarding standing up an advanced acquisition schoolhouse. Course validation, curriculum refinement, student throughput, and graduate management still needs to be fleshed out. The Air Force must continue to pursue growing and breeding a strong, knowledge, adaptable acquisition professional corps that is better educated and more prepared to tackle the acquisition domain.

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ABM	Air Battle Manager
ADO	Assistant Director of Operations
AFB	Air Force Base
AFI	Air Force Instruction
AFIT	Air Force Institute of Technology
AFLCMC	Air Force Life Cycle Management Center
AFMC	Air Force Materiel Command
AFSC	Air Force Specialty Code
AMMOS	Advanced Maintenance and Munitions Operations School
APDP	Acquisition Professional Development Program
ASPC	Advanced Sortied Production Course
ATAC	Advanced Tactical Acquisition Corps
AWF	Acquisition Workforce
AWFSP	Acquisition Workforce Strategic Plan
CBT	Computer Based Training
CAF	Combat Air Force
CGO	Company Grade Officer
CLP	Continuous Learning Points
CFETP	Career Field Education and Training Plan
DACM	Director of Acquisition Career Management
DAU	Defense Acquisition University
DAWDF	Defense Acquisition Workforce Development Fund
DAWIA	Defense Acquisition Workforce Improvement Act
DBS	Defense Business Services
DL	Distance Learning
DoD	Department of Defense
DoDI	Department of Defense Instruction
FY	Fiscal Year
GAO	Government Accountability Office
GO	General Officer
GS	General Schedule
HAF	Headquarters Air Force
HCI	Human Capital Initiatives
IAW	In Accordance With
IDE	Intermediate Developmental Education
LNO	Liaison Officer
MAF	Mobility Air Force
MAJCOM	Major Command
NDAA	National Defense Authorization Act
NDS	National Defense Strategy
OCONUS	Outside Continental United States
OSD	Office of the Secretary of Defense
O&M	Operation and Maintenance
OSD(AT&L)/HCI	Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics, Human Capital Initiatives

OUUSD(AT&L)	Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology and Logistics
PEO	Program Executive Office
PM	Program Management
RAND	Research ANd Development
SAF/AQH	Office of the Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for Acquisition, Air Force Acquisition Career Management
SAF/AQHA	Office of the Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for Acquisition, DAWDF Operations Division
SALT	Senior Acquisition Leadership Training
SEI	Special Experience Identifier
SES	Senior Executive Service
SME	Subject Matter Expert
SOCOM	Special Operations Command
SOF	Special Operations Force
TAFCSA	Total Active Federal Commissioned Service Date
TDY	Temporary Duty
USMC	United States Marine Corps
USN	United States Navy
USAF	United States Air Force
USAFWS	United States Air Force Weapons School
U.S.C.	United States Code
USD(AT&L)	Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics
WIC	Weapons Instructor Course
WTI	Weapons and Tactics Instructor Course

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