

**REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE**

*Form Approved  
OMB No. 0704-0188*

The public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing the burden, to Department of Defense, Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports (0704-0188), 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to any penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.  
**PLEASE DO NOT RETURN YOUR FORM TO THE ABOVE ADDRESS.**

<b>1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY)</b> 01-04-2020	<b>2. REPORT TYPE</b> Master of Military Studies (MMS) thesis	<b>3. DATES COVERED (From - To)</b> AY 2019-2020
--	--	---

<b>4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE</b> National Civics Crisis Requires Junior Officer PME	<b>5a. CONTRACT NUMBER</b> N/A
	<b>5b. GRANT NUMBER</b> N/A
	<b>5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER</b> N/A

<b>6. AUTHOR(S)</b> Foster, Peter C. (Major)	<b>5d. PROJECT NUMBER</b> N/A
	<b>5e. TASK NUMBER</b> N/A
	<b>5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER</b> N/A

<b>7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)</b> USMC Command and Staff College Marine Corps University 2076 South Street Quantico, VA 22134-5068	<b>8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER</b> N/A
--	--

<b>9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)</b> N/A	<b>10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)</b>
	<b>11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)</b> N/A

**12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT**  
Approved for public release, distribution unlimited.

**13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES**

**14. ABSTRACT**

The Marine Corps must create and implement Lieutenant PME that provides a standard overview of United States civics curricula in order to provide comprehensive and historical understanding of the country that Armed Forces Officers are sworn to protect. The Corps cannot rectify this education failure across the nation, but it can place a higher priority on educating those who join its ranks and preserve the cultivation of making outstanding citizens. Civic knowledge and historical understanding of our country and how it was fundamentally created is at an all-time low. Providing knowledge to tomorrow's leaders is a responsibility that every adult and senior officer must be charged with and an obligation that American citizens and the Armed Forces are failing to preserve. Introducing junior officer PME (professional military education) would provide a basic overview and an understanding of civics curricula, ensuring the education of our young officers, and certifying that those who are entrusted in our care become engaged, and knowledgeable citizens.

**15. SUBJECT TERMS**

Lieutenant PME, junior officer professional military education, civics, citizen

<b>16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:</b>			<b>17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT</b>	<b>18. NUMBER OF PAGES</b>	<b>19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON</b>
<b>a. REPORT</b>	<b>b. ABSTRACT</b>	<b>c. THIS PAGE</b>			USMC Command and Staff College
Unclass	Unclass	Unclass	UU	28	<b>19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (Include area code)</b> (703) 784-3330 (Admin Office)

# *Master of Military Studies Requirements for the Degree*

United States Marine Corps  
Command and Staff College  
Marine Corps University  
2076 South Street  
Marine Corps Combat Development Command  
Quantico, Virginia 22134-5068

## MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

---

**TITLE: National Civics Crisis Requires Junior Officer PME**

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

AUTHOR: Major Peter C. Foster

AY 19-20

---

Mentor and Oral Defense Committee Member: Craig Swanson, Ph.D.

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: 27 March 2020

Oral Defense Committee Member: LtCol Jude Shell

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: 27 March 2020

**Table of Contents**

TABLE OF CONTENTS..... I

DISCLAIMER ..... II

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY ..... III

PREFACE..... IV

INTRODUCTION ..... 1

CIVICS VIRTUE..... 2

THE CIVICS CRISIS ..... 4

MAKING QUALITY CITIZENS..... 7

TOO MANY PEBBLES IN THE PACK ..... 9

PROPOSED PME..... 10

COUNTER THE IGNORANCE FOR THOSE WHO HAVE VOLUNTEERED..... 14

FRAMEWORK FOR A GOOD CIVICS EDUCATION ..... 16

CONCLUSION..... 18

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS..... 20

U.S. NATIONAL CIVICS TEST AND CURRICULUM..... 21

BIBLIOGRAPHY..... 22

## DISCLAIMER

THE OPINIONS AND CONCLUSIONS EXPRESSED HEREIN ARE THOSE OF THE INDIVIDUAL STUDENT AUTHOR AND DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT THE VIEWS OF EITHER THE MARINE CORPS COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE OR ANY OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCY. REFERENCES TO THIS STUDY SHOULD INCLUDE THE FOREGOING STATEMENT.

QUOTATION FROM, ABSTRACTION FROM, OR REPRODUCTION OF ALL OR ANY PART OF THIS DOCUMENT IS PERMITTED PROVIDED PROPER ACKNOWLEDGEMENT IS MADE.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Title:** National Civics Crisis Requires Junior Officer PME

**Author:** Major Peter C. Foster, United States Marine Corps

**Thesis:** The Marine Corps must create and implement Lieutenant PME that provides a standard overview of United States civics curricula in order to provide comprehensive and historical understanding of the country that Armed Forces Officers are sworn to protect and fortify their role as knowledgeable, upstanding citizens.

**Discussion:** The purpose of this paper is to highlight this knowledge gap within our education system and bring attention to that same gap which requires remediation within our own ranks. The future of American democracy relies on the education of its citizens. Providing knowledge to tomorrow's leaders is a responsibility that every adult and senior officer must be charged with and an obligation that American citizens and the Armed Forces are failing to preserve. Civic knowledge and historical understanding of our country and how it was fundamentally created is at an all-time low. Currently, during a time when 70% of Marines separate from the Corps after their first four year tour, it is paramount that we introduce civic education at the beginning of their careers if we are to claim that we make outstanding citizens. Introducing junior officer PME (professional military education) would provide a basic overview and an understanding of civics curricula, ensuring the education of our young officers, and certifying that those who are entrusted in our care become engaged, and knowledgeable citizens.

**Conclusion:** The Corps cannot have a service filled with uneducated, ignorant leaders who can't pass a citizenship test, yet fight for the very freedom that forged the material. If Marines state that they set the standard for citizenship, then they had better be able to prove and support that claim. The Marine Corps must create and implement Lieutenant PME that provides a standard overview of United States civics curricula in order to provide comprehensive and historical understanding of the country that Armed Forces Officers are sworn to protect. The Corps cannot rectify this education failure across the nation, but it can place a higher priority on educating those who join its ranks and preserve the cultivation of making outstanding citizens.

## Preface

My introduction to civic knowledge came at a young age when I attended elementary school. It was during a time when the public education system still promoted the importance of civic education as we learned about our forefathers, the government, listened to songs about “bills on capitol hill” and pledged allegiance to the flag every morning. While this education has proved beneficial to me and to many others of like generations, it has since been replaced with common core subjects, and as the focus of civics knowledge decreased throughout the nation, the fear of losing the comprehension that fuels American democracy increases.

Today, the street side general surveys that can be readily seen on late night talk shows, where average citizens fail to answer basic civic and historical questions about the United States, although some might find it entertaining, many do not find humor in the illiterate answers as this lack of knowledge and skill set has since become the norm amongst society, to include its citizens, service members, and political elite. After reading this paper, I encourage the reader to seek out additional resources and draw their own conclusions.

In writing this paper I received support from a number of people and would like to recognize many of them. I would first like to thank my wife Karen, whose love, tolerance, selflessness, and support were invaluable. I would be remised if I did not include my wonderful children in that same regards, who allowed me the time to conduct hours of research and who provided me with whimsical curiosity and understanding. I would also like to thank my advisor, Dr. Craig Swanson, who became instantly enthusiastic about my topic, and who granted me the latitude to explore this topic, provided valuable insight for research, and guided me in strengthening this paper. Finally, I would like to thank all of the family, friends, mentors, and service members who exemplify the virtues of citizenry and who are the acceptance to the norm.

# *Master of Military Studies: National Civics Crisis Requires Junior Officer PME*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Whenever American citizens talk about the future of the country, they are really speaking about the youth of today. Educating young people and providing knowledge to tomorrow's leaders is a responsibility that every adult must be charged with and an obligation that American citizens are failing to preserve. Civic knowledge and historical understanding of the United States and how it was fundamentally created is at an all-time low. As a nation, Americans struggle with basic civics understanding to include the ability to state all three branches of government, name who the Vice President is, or even identify such positions as the Secretary of State or their local congressman. Historical civics knowledge is just as poor, when many citizens cannot tell you who won the civil war or what country the U.S. gained their independence from. This lack of knowledge and education has been in significant decline within the last decade and it is not only a fight the Nation is losing within its public school systems but within its military ranks and all members of the Department of Defense. Without a solid understanding of governmental structure and civic literacy, the countries armed forces officers will fail at becoming educated, engaged, and knowledgeable citizens and leaders. If a commissioned officer in the USMC (United States Marine Corps) can wear a uniform that says, "U.S" on it, that same individual should know what it represents and what it stands for.

All USMC Lieutenants swear an oath to the Constitution yet most are unaware of what the document even stands for and are not aware of the existence and purpose of numerous other strategic documents that shape not only their careers but that of their country. Introducing junior officer PME (professional military education) would provide a basic overview and an understanding of civics curricula, ensuring the education of young officers, and concluding with a measure of comprehension of the material. This proposed education block will serve as the

## ***Master of Military Studies: National Civics Crisis Requires Junior Officer PME***

beginning of their officer PME careers following The Basic School, fulfill the need for basic civics knowledge (especially for our next generation officers), develop responsible citizenship, and serve as a promotion requirement to include criteria for talent management.

The Corps cannot have a service filled with uneducated, ignorant leaders who cannot pass a citizenship test, yet fight for the very freedom that forged the material. If military service members state that they set the standard for citizenship, then they had better be able to prove and support that claim. The Marine Corps must create and implement Lieutenant PME that provides a standard overview of United States civics curricula in order to provide comprehensive and historical understanding of the country that Armed Forces Officers are sworn to protect and fortify their role as knowledgeable, upstanding citizens.

### **CIVICS VIRTUE**

Ideally in a democratic society, the citizens are actively engaged in the nation's governance while participation and involvement is based on factual information that shapes political opinions and civic issues. This type of successful system is built on educating its citizens and keeping them properly informed in order to make educated decisions, to include voting and civic engagement. Without such knowledge, national civic apathy could result in the end of democracy. William Damon, an Education Professor at Stanford University wrote in an article titled, The Core of Civic Virtue, that the possibility of the country's future ending up in the hands of a citizenship that lack understanding of the benefits and duties of citizens is the most serious modern threat to America.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> William Damon, "The core of civic virtue," Hoover Digest, 3 (July 2011), <http://www.hoover.org/research/core-civic-virtue>.

## ***Master of Military Studies: National Civics Crisis Requires Junior Officer PME***

All American citizens need a solid foundation of civic knowledge and understanding so that they can develop informed opinions about political matters and have intelligent and factual perspectives on government functions and institutions so that they may participate effectively in a democracy. Military members and school students from every state must pursue knowledge about national foundations, important civic documents, and be able to reflect on historical events and shared experiences to understand and navigate present day issues. When discussing civic engagement in the United States, research was conducted by the Educational Testing Service in 2002 and stated that in addition to acting as the foundation of a successful democracy and a prosperous future, civic engagement also impacts important civic and social attributes. For example, civic knowledge promotes democratic values, political participation, trust in public life and public figures, and can change attitudes on important social issues. Other benefits of a civically engaged populous include the economic well-being of the society and the psychological well-being of its members<sup>2</sup>

Citizenship carries with it not only responsibilities but privileges as well. In a democracy individuals can vote and participate in the electoral process, serve as jurors, abide by, create, and even change laws and in certain capacities such as military service members, even go to war in order to protect those freedoms and privileges. To fulfill these responsibilities, especially that of the service member, citizens must have knowledge and understanding of the countries origins, its structure, the governing institutions, and legal framework. For most American citizens, this

---

<sup>2</sup> Richard Coley & Andrew Sum, "Fault lines in our democracy: Civic knowledge, voting behavior, and civic engagement in the United States," Educational Testing Service, 2012. [https://www.ets.org/research/policy\\_research\\_reports/publications/report/2012/jezn](https://www.ets.org/research/policy_research_reports/publications/report/2012/jezn)

## ***Master of Military Studies: National Civics Crisis Requires Junior Officer PME***

information was taught by parents or learned in school, an educational framework that is diminishing in its civic acknowledgement and importance.

### **THE CIVICS CRISIS**

Civics education is important because democracy is our chosen form of government. This type of rule is not guaranteed as it must be fought for, protected, and for it to work its people must participate. In order for participation to endure, the citizens must be educated on the political system and their individual rights so that they understand their role as a contributing member of society, their responsibility to keep the system running, and build equity in the results and actions of the government. If citizens do not maintain their obligation to democracy, then democracy will fail. For this reason, civics classes and civics education should be a priority in the nation's education system, instead of being limited in its teachings since the 1960s. Further, the military should set the example by displaying its importance and making it an education priority for all junior officers within their contracted first tour of duty. Those who volunteer to protect America might not do it for twenty years or even past the first four, but they can guarantee they understand what they stood for while serving. The purpose of education is not to make factory workers but to create good citizens who can contribute to the success of a nation no matter their career choice.

The primary goal of the American public school system should be to not only prepare young people for career paths and higher education, but also for active citizenship. America must focus to close the civics education gap and prepare young voters for civic engagement and to become not only informed members of society and their communities, but informed future leaders. Historically, in the 1950s and 60s, the focus of public schooling was civics education as it was woven into elementary education. Unfortunately, today's educational focus has shifted

## ***Master of Military Studies: National Civics Crisis Requires Junior Officer PME***

towards basic schools of thought such as science, technology, mathematics and high-stake testing that contributes to quantifiable data, while the importance of civics knowledge has been left out of standardized testing. The Joe Foss Institute, a national civics education initiative launched in 2014, describes this crisis in civics knowledge as follows:

Our system of government depends on the consent of the governed, and on active, responsible citizenship. Yet the Department of Education's own studies show: Only one-third of Americans can name the three branches of government; Eight in ten cannot name even two rights granted by the Declaration of Independence. Worse yet, only one in five of our 8th graders scored proficient in civics and history. We must take decisive action now. Our Nation is experiencing the consequences of what has often been termed "the quiet crisis in education": Today, a generation of Americans have had no education in Civics and now have no knowledge of America's history, America's Constitution and its principles, and they are uninformed of the origins and strengths of our political system. Consequently, a generation of Americans do not understand their role as citizens, don't understand their civic responsibilities, don't know how to participate in our republic, and don't understand their critical role in our democratic process and their rights and responsibilities as Citizens.<sup>3</sup>

These young people that the Department of Education describe are the same ignorant adolescence who will soon be running a country they know nothing about. The fact that today's youth struggle with knowing who won the civil war but have no problem answering who won the last season of *Dancing With the Stars* is not only troubling to recognize, but even worse, it is not an isolated problem, and is one that spreads even to those who defend the nation within America's own military services. Many service members that represent America struggle with these same questions as they are raised within the same public institutions. This "Quiet Crisis" as the Civics Education Initiative describes, directs reader's attention to data from a recent report by the Education Commission of the States noting the following statements:

Ample Evidence documents the poor state of American civic literacy. Low levels of student proficiency on the national K-12 student civics test, college graduate survey results and the inability of most adults to identify civics facts suggest that, taken as a whole, the nation's current civic education efforts are insufficient. According to the

---

<sup>3</sup> Joe Foss Institute, "Civics Education Initiative Fact Sheet," 2019, <http://civicseducationinitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/CEI-Fact-Sheet-Aug-2019.pdf>

## ***Master of Military Studies: National Civics Crisis Requires Junior Officer PME***

National Assessment of Educational Progress, only 9 percent of 4th grade students can identify a picture of Abraham Lincoln and tell us two things he did that were important. In 8th grade, just seven percent of students could identify the three branches of government and overall – only 24% of seniors in high schools scored proficient or above on the NAEP civics test. Studies by the Annenberg Foundation show that a third of U.S. citizens can't name even one branch of our federal government.<sup>4</sup>

The fact of the matter is that the future of America rests in the hands of generations of young people who are more familiar with the Kardashians than they are about the constitution or the meaning of 'checks and balances.' In an article titled, *Civic Ignorance Threatens American Liberty*, published by the CATO Institute, a public research organization dedicated to the principles of individual liberties, was a number of statistics such as: The National Constitution Center interviewed 1,000 adults and found that 24 percent cannot name a single right guaranteed by the First Amendment; Only 6 percent can cite freedoms of speech, press, assembly and religion; Fifty-two percent do not know the Senate has 100 members; One in six believes the Constitution created a Christian nation.<sup>5</sup> The article also went on to describe the type of government that most detached, uninformed, and ill-equipped citizens seem comfortable with these days, expressed in the following verbal illustration:

Unaware of what the Constitution entails, affluent and disengaged Americans seem rather comfortable with a kind of elective monarchy. Every four years, they pick a king who governs largely as he wishes. Members of Congress -- like an American House of Lords - breezily conduct their own affairs. The two divisions of the royal family occasionally cooperate, usually -- but not always -- within the law. Every other November, Americans decide which among them may keep their orbs and scepters and continue ruling at their whim.<sup>6</sup>

Preparing young people for engaged citizenship is crucial for the success of liberty and democracy in a free society, and America's adult citizens are failing in this capacity. Problems

---

<sup>4</sup> Joe Foss Institute, "Civics Education Initiative Fact Sheet," 2019.

<sup>5</sup> Deroy Murdock, "Civic Ignorance Threatens American Liberty," *CATO Institute* (June 2000), <https://www.cato.org/publications/commentary/civic-ignorance-threatens-american-liberty>

<sup>6</sup> Deroy Murdock, "Civic Ignorance Threatens American Liberty," *CATO Institute* (June 2000).

## ***Master of Military Studies: National Civics Crisis Requires Junior Officer PME***

such as a decline in civic knowledge and patriotism, rise in cynicism, self-absorption, historical and geo-political ignorance, and indifference to the common good can be readily found in all generations of American society, to include the rich and the poor, the educated and the deprived, the young and the old, and between both citizens and service members. It is shameful to acknowledge that while so many young volunteers sign up to fight for freedom on foreign soil, the vast majority of them and their civilian peers show little interest in the state of their nation. American history has been lost to entire generations and young service members are no longer the exception. Many have grown up ill-educated, attracted to social media and instant gratification, oblivious to current affairs, and more often do not even understand the conflicts they find themselves fighting in. The future of our military will end up in the hands of leaders who do not understand the duties of citizenship and will be unable to recognize and defend against that which threatens liberty. Current military leaders who are responsible for educating today's junior officers must meet the challenge to be stewards of America's priceless heritage. The Marine Corps must take stock in citizenry and ensure moral and civic virtue is instilled in every commissioned officer. The Corps cannot rectify this education failure across the nation, but it can place a higher priority on educating those who join its ranks and preserve the cultivation of making outstanding citizens.

### **MAKING QUALITY CITIZENS**

Former Commandants and Marine Corps leaders have a published history of highlighting the importance of citizenship. In Marine Corps Order (MCO) 1500.61 with the subject title of, Marine Leader Development, former Commandant General Robert B. Neller echoed the importance of General John A. Lejeune's belief in that the Marine Corps makes Marines, wins

## ***Master of Military Studies: National Civics Crisis Requires Junior Officer PME***

battles, and ultimately returns quality citizens back to society.<sup>7</sup> The aforementioned MCO builds on that foundation by focusing on developing Marines who can succeed not only in the Corps but in life, and quotes the Marine Corps Manual by stating the task of, “developing the leadership qualities of Marines enables them to assume progressively greater responsibilities to the Marine Corps and to Society.”<sup>8</sup> General Charles C. Krulak once wrote, “The individual Marine IS the Corps.”<sup>9</sup> This statement captures the ethos of the Marine Corps and how it lives and dies by the actions of its members. By the same token that a single Marines conduct in combat can be front page news and give the Corps a ‘black eye’ then the same can be said about the knowledge of its members, or lack thereof, can discredit the organizations stable base of citizenry. General Krulak’s father, Lieutenant General Victor H. “Brute” Krulak, in 1957 in response to a written question from then-Commandant, Gen Randolph McCall Pate, on why America needed a Marine Corps responded with a transcendent and eloquent statement which included his belief that the Corps is downright good for the manhood of the country.<sup>10</sup> He then followed this statement by saying, “the Marines are masters of a form of un-failing alchemy which converts un-oriented youths into proud, self-reliant stable citizens – citizens into whose hands the nation’s affairs may safely be entrusted.”<sup>11</sup> Within the Corps own Commandants Planning Guidance, General Berger reinforces the importance of PME and states that it is a necessary investment and the responsibility of every Marine.<sup>12</sup> If we hold the words of these leaders to be true and self-

---

<sup>7</sup>Commandant of the Marine Corps, *Marine Leader Development*, MCO 1500.61, July 28, 2017, [https://www.hqmc.marines.mil/Portals/61/Users/254/50/4350/MCO%201500.61%20Marine%20Leader%20Development%20\(Spiritual%20Fitness\).pdf](https://www.hqmc.marines.mil/Portals/61/Users/254/50/4350/MCO%201500.61%20Marine%20Leader%20Development%20(Spiritual%20Fitness).pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Commandant of the Marine Corps, *Marine Leader Development*, MCO 1500.61, 2017.

<sup>9</sup> William Bowers, “Making Marines in the All-Volunteer Era,” Marine Corps University (November 2018), <https://www.usmcu.edu/Portals/218/LLI/MLD/Making%20Marines%20in%20the%20All-Volunteer%20Era.pdf?ver=2018-11-27-155103-017>

<sup>10</sup> William Bowers, “Making Marines in the All-Volunteer Era,” Marine Corps University (2018), 1.

<sup>11</sup> William Bowers, “Making Marines in the All-Volunteer Era,” Marine Corps University (2018), 1.

<sup>12</sup> David H. Berger, *Commandant’s Planning Guidance* (Washington, DC: Headquarters USMC, Jul 2019) 7.

## ***Master of Military Studies: National Civics Crisis Requires Junior Officer PME***

evident, then this unified effort of developing quality citizens should most certainly start with ensuring every Marine leader is educated and armed with a solid base of civic knowledge and the importance of this citizen responsibility is fostered and nurtured by the power of example.

### **TOO MANY PEBBLES IN THE PACK**

This educational gap, while acknowledged, can also easily be brushed aside and shifted away from the responsibility of the military institution, and be viewed as the responsibility of the individual or that of the public education system. The idea that Americans need to pay more attention to civics is hard to argue against. If the hope is for citizens to be more factually knowledgeable and educated to refrain from promulgating fake news, pondering over social media propaganda, and subscribing to simulated articles from unknown sources than schooling must adopt a more aggressive approach towards such curricula and develop this base of education in young adults before they ever even enter military service. Those who subscribe to “common core subjects” and feel that ensuing decades of standardized testing which is used more for percentages and budget gains over tangible education, would point out that all 50 states require some form of civics instruction on government within its public schools system. Mostly every student takes at least one civics test by the time they graduate high school, yet reinforcement of the curriculum or experienced-based learning such as guided debates of discussion on current events or political processes is almost non-existent outside of focus groups and competitions.

There is also the existing thought that Lieutenant PME is not needed and will add “too many pebbles in the pack” for young officers. After all, newly commissioned Marine Corps Lieutenants spend six months at The Basic School already and another 3-6 months at their specialty school before entering the fleet, allowing them two years on average to adapt, lead, and

## ***Master of Military Studies: National Civics Crisis Requires Junior Officer PME***

be evaluated for continued service. During this time, young officers can also be flooded with the responsibilities of leadership, deployments, and even combat, so the idea of adding mandatory education seems cumbersome, overwhelming, and even distracting.

### **PROPOSED PME**

The knowledge gap is fairly easy to identify but the proper solution is not. Recommending a strong civics curriculum to include participation, research, and senior officer led discussion and examination is only as affective as the program it becomes implemented with. While this paper is meant to bring attention to the civics education crisis, it does not assume the role of providing a clear-cut course of action. A realistic solution that results in actual PME that can be implemented across the Marine Corps is not possible without the consideration and attention of Headquarters Marine Corps, Manpower, and leadership from Training and Education Command along with Marine Corps University. This paper does however highlight a PME gap and argues the need for such curriculum, while also being casted as a starting point for a planning team.

With that said, obvious factors to consider when designing such a program is timing and duration. Should a junior officer have their entire Lieutenant career to complete individual training or should it be unit driven PME, possibly led by the Battalion Executive Officer? Should the civics test be turned into a MarineNet course and the graduation certificate be part of an officer's OMPF? If PME does get implemented, does passing the 100 question civics test be an option to fulfill the requirement and 'test out' of the time taken to conduct the recommended PME or does seminar time promote more promise and understanding? Any attempt to enforce mandatory learning will hardly be met with full support from every unit and member, but the intent of the education should be fully endorsed and supported by all. Just like any program, if

## ***Master of Military Studies: National Civics Crisis Requires Junior Officer PME***

and when implemented it will not survive first contact and will undoubtedly require adjustment, but the end state should always echo our former leaders guidance, and ensure we are educating our future leaders and creating upstanding citizens.

To apply common sense to the problem, it is understood that this suggested civics education should not become overly time consuming, nor should it be task oriented such as having the need for papers or projects, and its intent should be solely focused around providing a base knowledge of civics information that every American citizen and military commissioned officer should know. For example, a junior officer might not be expected to read all of the Federalist Papers but they should know they exist and what they represent. A junior officer might not need to memorize every amendment to the constitution while also having to learn how to build a relationship with their first SNCO, but they should know what the constitution is and the difference between it, and the bill of rights. A junior officer does not need to implement the strategies of the National Defense Strategy or the Commandants Planning Guidance, but should know such strategy and guidance documents exist and that the direction of the service is not simply built upon imprudent decisions by senior leaders who plan in vacuums.

Many will say that this curricula already exists and military PME such as Expeditionary Warfare School (EWS) and Command and Staff College (C&S) go into great detail on such topics in order to provide the necessary civics knowledge to Marine Officers. However, with the current public school system and the Marine Corps current PME timeline, the institution is not analyzing the civics knowledge of our future leaders until they are 8-12 years into their careers. Per the 2017 Marine Corps Demographics report, if 66% of Marines are 25 years or younger, average time served is 5.1 years, 64% of Marines are in their first tour and on average 75% of

## ***Master of Military Studies: National Civics Crisis Requires Junior Officer PME***

officers and enlisted are first term separations.<sup>13</sup> The statistics in this 2017 report supports the argument that the current PME timeline inhibits the Marine Corps from educating the majority of its officers, and civics education is being taught far too late.

In a paper annotating the history of Marine Corps PME and the evolution of curriculum taught at C&S, Lieutenant Colonel Donald F. Bittner described the Marine Corps' three tiered PME approach that the institution holds for Company to Field Grade offices, noting The Basic School, the then, Amphibious Warfare School, and it's Command & Staff College. In this paper he states the primary purpose envisioned for such education is to, "dedicate itself to producing an educated "whole man," an officer well-grounded in the operational skills so necessary in a professional military officer, but also one who can place any military operation to which he might be committed within a knowledgeable strategic and diplomatic context."<sup>14</sup> In this paper LtCol Bittner even referenced the late Brigadier General James C. Breckinridge, who stated back in the 1940's that, "It has been my belief for years that the schools shape the Corps....The schools are the cause and the Fleet Marine Forces are the effect."<sup>15</sup> If these schools shape the officers, the officers shape the Corps, and then once separated from active service, the officers shape the future of our country, then this curriculum needs to keep pace with the needs of its students, and at times, correct the ship when needed. LtCol Bittner concluded his paper by stating the Marine Corps PME has continued to evolve since the 1920's and often required minor shifts in direction and emphasis. His final sentences read, "Over the years, leaders within the

---

<sup>13</sup> The Marine Corps: *Demographics Update*. Headquarters Marine Corps Marine & Family Programs, 2017, file:///D:/Downloads/2017%20Demographics%20Booklet%20Jun(1).pdf

<sup>14</sup> Donald Bittner, "Curriculum Evolution: Marine Corps Command and Staff College 1920-1988," History and Museums Division Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, Washington D. C. (1988), Executive Summary, <https://www.marines.mil/News/Publications/MCPPEL/Electronic-Library-Display/Article/898275/curriculum-evolution-marine-corps-command-and-staff-college-1920-1988/>

<sup>15</sup> Donald Bittner, "Curriculum Evolution: Marine Corps Command and Staff College 1920-1988," Executive Summary.

## *Master of Military Studies: National Civics Crisis Requires Junior Officer PME*

Education Center have wisely and carefully preserved time-tested programs, resisting change for the sake of change. Yet, with equally sound judgement, they have also had the foresight to anticipate and plan for future needs.”<sup>16</sup> If the Corps is going to keep pace with its past wisdom and anticipate education requirements, than it must recognize the fact that the future will require well educated civilian leaders and the Marine Corps can start by ensuring it develops well educated Marines.

The Marine Corps cannot state that they make great citizens without following through with inspecting what they expect them to know within the average time served. The demographics show that on average, 75% of the force will never attend or receive that, “PME stamp of approval” prior to returning them back to society. Further, and in support of General Krulak’s belief that every Marine represents the Corps, the following example is offered:

If a Company Grade officer goes home on leave and goes to a bar with a group of friends where they are conducting a trivia night and offering up questions about general civics knowledge such as past wars, leaders, or American history, as they often do, who does the team turn to for answers? The assumption is that the present Military Officer is the subject matter expert on such affairs on top of being an educated, upstanding citizen who possesses such trivial knowledge without having to look up the answer. When this same individual who is publically representing the Marine Corps has to also look at their smart phone for the answers is when that individual discredits the academic resolve of the organizations PME structure and highlights the fact that its members know very little about what they have sworn to protect.

The above scenario should not come to a shock to most readers as the smart phone and other advancements in technologies have dissolved many people’s desires for self-study outside of news feeds and classroom assigned mandatory work. Newer generations of young people’s

---

<sup>16</sup> Donald Bittner, “Curriculum Evolution: Marine Corps Command and Staff College 1920-1988,” Executive Summary.

## ***Master of Military Studies: National Civics Crisis Requires Junior Officer PME***

indulgences lie elsewhere in the social media world, where history holds little value. The problem becomes extremely evident when items such as the Constitution are viewed in a historical context, instead of as a living document that influences current affairs. Young people have become too optimistic about their futures and too complacent in their concerns for the sustainment and longevity of American democracy. Democracy is still an experiment, and history has shown that few democratic countries have withstood the test of time, a lesson far too many individuals easily forget. The majority of citizens also forget that their civic duty is essential to the survival of democracy, with each new generation needing the knowledge and skills to reproduce and preserve the American way of life.

### **COUNTER THE IGNORANCE FOR THOSE WHO HAVE VOLUNTEERED**

It is relatively easy for society to produce generations of technically skilled individuals, however, it is far more difficult to instill the level of individual commitment necessary to maintain the type of society and government that most take for granted. This necessary skill set is depleting with each new wave of young people who know nothing but American prosperity. Many want a government who respects human rights, acknowledges individual worth, and thrive in a society that observes the rule of law and concern for the common good, yet many forget that those rights and privileges were fought and died for not so long ago. This challenge is cleverly captured by the perspective of a 26 year old graduate school student who wrote the following in an article titled, My Generation is blind to the Prosperity around Us:

I'm sitting in a small coffee shop trying to think of what to write about. I scroll through my newsfeed on my phone looking at the latest headlines of presidential candidates calling for policies to "fix" the so-called injustices of capitalism. I put my phone down and continue to look around. I see people talking freely, working on their MacBook's, ordering food they get in an instant, seeing cars go by outside, and it dawned on me. We live in the most privileged time in the most prosperous nation and we've become completely blind to it. Vehicles, food, technology, freedom to associate with whom we choose. These things are so ingrained in our American way of life we don't give them a

## ***Master of Military Studies: National Civics Crisis Requires Junior Officer PME***

second thought. We are so well off here in the United States that our poverty line begins 31 times above the global average! Virtually no one in the United States is considered poor by global standards. Yet, in a time where we can order a product off Amazon with one click and have it at our doorstep the next day, we are unappreciative, unsatisfied, and ungrateful. Our unappreciation is evident as the popularity of socialist policies among my generation continues to grow. My generation is being indoctrinated by a mainstream narrative to actually believe we have never seen prosperity. Why then, with all of the overwhelming evidence around us, evidence that I can even see sitting at a coffee shop, do we not view this as prosperity? We have people who are dying to get into our country. People around the world destitute and truly impoverished. Yet, we have a young generation convinced they've never seen prosperity, and as a result, we elect some politicians who are dead set on taking steps towards abolishing capitalism. Why? The answer is this, my generation has only seen prosperity. We have no contrast. We didn't live in the great depression, or live through two world wars, the Korean War, The Vietnam War or we didn't see the rise and fall of socialism and communism. We don't know what it's like to live without the internet, without cars, without smartphones. We don't have a lack of prosperity problem. We have an entitlement problem, an ungratefulness problem, and it's spreading like a plague."<sup>17</sup>

While the military cannot provide a solution to this national societal problem, it can control the ignorance of its members and the information it provides to the young men and women who volunteer every day, answering the call and joining the ranks. As formally stated, although this paper does not offer a program of record to patch up this PME gap, it can and should provide a framework of reference in order to clarify the proper study material and learning objectives. In lieu of having every Marine search for the U.S. Nationalization test, regurgitating facts on bubble sheets, and becoming statistical data, the methodology should promote a sense of community, enforce ownership, and reflect the importance of the material. Good civic education actively involves its participants in democratic dialogue that promotes realistic truths about political life and the acceptance of self-governance. Understanding rights and responsibilities is not solely for the purpose of Marine leaders being informed but to apply critical reflection and analysis of the current, complex issues and conflicts of today.

---

<sup>17</sup> Alyssa Ahlgren, "College Student: My Generation is blind to the Prosperity around us." *Foundation for Economic Education*, April 2019. <https://fee.org/articles/college-student-my-generation-is-blind-to-the-prosperity-around-us/>

## *Master of Military Studies: National Civics Crisis Requires Junior Officer PME*

### **FRAMEWORK FOR A GOOD CIVICS EDUCATION**

The intent is to provide a framework and an understanding of what a good civic education looks like and identify the essential components to this course of study. Fortunately, the National Standards of Civics and Government have already addressed, researched, and answered this question and in doing so, have identified three essential components to providing a good civics education: civic knowledge, civic skills, and civic dispositions. While civic knowledge is the subject matter and civic skills is putting that learned subject matter into action, civic disposition are the traits and characteristics embodied by its participants that are necessary for the maintenance and continued improvement of constitutional democracy. While all three components are highly important for a well-rounded civics education, the study of civics knowledge fulfills the PME requirement for providing a base of civics understanding and familiarity to its Marine officers.

Civic knowledge concentrates on the content of what American citizens and service members should know. The National Standards for Civics and Government embodied this knowledge component in the form of five pointed, persistent, and enduring questions. These questions should serve as the curriculum lines of effort (LOEs) for the suggested PME and are not only able to encourage meaningful discussion but also engage critical thought of every citizen and military student. The five questions are:

- I. What are civic life, politics, and government?
- II. What are the foundations of the American Political System?
- III. How does the government established by the Constitution embody the purposes, values, and principles of American democracy?
- IV. What is the relationship of the United States to other nations and to world affairs?
- V. What are the roles of citizens in American Democracy?<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> Margeret Branson, *"The Role of Civic Education"* (A Forthcoming Education Policy Task Force Position Paper from the Communitarian Network), Center for Civic Education, 1998, [https://civiced.org/papers/articles\\_role.html](https://civiced.org/papers/articles_role.html)

## ***Master of Military Studies: National Civics Crisis Requires Junior Officer PME***

It is important that every junior officer study, contemplate, and deliberate over these questions about the nation's government, society, and the roles and responsibilities of each citizen as these are the essential democratic foundations that service members must understand in order to properly protect. Margaret Stimmann Branson, Associate Director for the Center of Civic Education describes the innate tangible and intangible importance within each question. The following key takeaways and points for discussion alone should be the underpinning for which the Marine Corps Lieutenant PME is built upon:

Addressing the first question, *"What are civic life, politics, and government?"* helps citizens make informed judgments about the nature of civic life, politics, and government, and why politics and government are necessary; the purposes of government; the essential characteristics of limited and unlimited government; the nature and purposes of constitutions, and alternative ways of organizing constitutional governments. Consideration of this question should promote greater understanding of the nature and importance of civil society or the complex network of freely formed, voluntary political, social, and economic associations which is an essential component of a constitutional democracy. A vital civil society not only prevents the abuse or excessive concentration of power by government; the organizations of civil society serve as public laboratories in which citizens learn democracy by doing it.

The second question, *"What are the foundations of the American political system?"* entails an understanding of the historical, philosophical, and economic foundations of the American political system; the distinctive characteristics of American society and political culture; and the values and principles basic to American constitutional democracy, such as individual rights and responsibilities, concern for the public good, the rule of law, justice, equality, diversity, truth, patriotism, federalism, and the separation of powers. This question promotes examination of the values and principles expressed in such fundamental documents as the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution, The Federalist Papers, and landmark Supreme Court decisions. Knowledge of the ideals, values, and principles set forth in the nation's core documents serves an additional and useful purpose. Those ideals, values, and principles are criteria which citizens can use to judge the means and ends of government, as well as the means and ends of the myriad groups that are part of civil society.

The third question, *"How does the government established by the Constitution embody the purposes, values, and principles of American democracy?"* helps citizens understand and evaluate the limited government they have ordained and established and the complex dispersal and sharing of powers it entails. Citizens who understand the justification for this system of limited, dispersed, and shared power and its design are better able to hold their governments-local, state, and national-accountable and to ensure that the rights of

## ***Master of Military Studies: National Civics Crisis Requires Junior Officer PME***

individuals are protected. They also will develop a considered appreciation of the place of law in the American political system, as well as of the unparalleled opportunities for choice and citizen participation that the system makes possible.

The fourth question, "*What is the relationship of the United States to other nations and to world affairs?*" is important because the United States does not exist in isolation; it is a part of an increasingly interconnected world. To make judgments about the role of the United States in the world today and about what course American foreign policy should take, citizens need to understand the major elements of international relations and how world affairs affect their own lives, and the security and wellbeing of their communities, state, and nation. Citizens also need to develop a better understanding of the roles of major international governmental and non-governmental organizations, because of the increasingly significant role that they are playing in the political, social, and economic realms.

The final question, "*What are the roles of citizens in American democracy?*" is of particular importance. Citizenship in a constitutional democracy means that each citizen is a full and equal member of a self-governing community and is endowed with fundamental rights and entrusted with responsibilities. Citizens should understand that through their involvement in political life and in civil society, they can help to improve the quality of life in their neighborhoods, communities, and nation. If they want their voices to be heard, they must become active participants in the political process. Although elections, campaigns, and voting are central to democratic institutions, citizens should learn that beyond electoral politics many participatory opportunities are open to them. Finally, they should come to understand that the attainment of individual goals and public goals tend to go hand in hand with participation in political life and civil society. They are more likely to achieve personal goals for themselves and their families, as well as the goals they desire for their communities, state, and nation, if they are informed, effective, and responsible citizens.<sup>19</sup>

### **CONCLUSION**

In 1990, with a particular focus on civic education, the National Governors Association declared: If the United States is to maintain a strong and responsible democracy and a prosperous and growing economy into the next century, it must be prepared to address and respond to major challenges at home and in the world. A well-educated population is the key to our future.

Americans must be prepared to...Participate knowledgeably in our democracy and our democratic institutions...Function effectively in increasingly diverse communities and states and

---

<sup>19</sup> Margeret Branson, "*The Role of Civic Education*" 1998.

## ***Master of Military Studies: National Civics Crisis Requires Junior Officer PME***

in a rapidly shrinking world...Today a new standard of an educated citizenry is required, one suitable for the next century...[All students] must understand and accept the responsibilities and obligations of citizenship.<sup>20</sup> This statement was issued three decades ago, and for those concerned, it is clear that America has not yet achieved the education goals that it set for itself and its citizens.

The Marine Corps must lead by example by creating and implementing Lieutenant PME that provides a standard overview of United States civics curricula. Once developed, this education can be broadened to every Marine at every rank, instilling a standard across the Corps. Brigadier General William J. Bowers, former Commanding Officer of Marine Corps University once wrote, “We cannot ever forget that the United States Marine Corps is a still developing story; ours is the ever continuing story of the challenges faced and triumphs won by the individual Marine, and our institution has grown ever stronger by the steady pressure of constant change. We are truly a breed apart.”<sup>21</sup> As the Corps moves forward in its never ending quest to improve PME, standing on the shoulders of giants with a history unlike any other nation, the challenge of our forebears lie before us: If we are to stay a “breed apart” and remain the shining example of citizenry and patriotism, than we must acknowledge the fragility of democracy, protect it with educated leaders and informed citizens, and cultivate a service of historical and knowledgeable stewards of America’s great heritage. In the most profound manner, the future of the Nation lies within its youth, and the future of the Corps lies within itself and within its people. It is the Corps responsibility to find a solution to this knowledge gap, and develop future leaders and citizens that it can be proud of.

---

<sup>20</sup> Margeret Branson, *“The Role of Civic Education”* 1998.

<sup>21</sup> William Bowers, “Making Marines in the All-Volunteer Era,” Marine Corps University (2018), 2.

# *Master of Military Studies: National Civics Crisis Requires Junior Officer PME*

## **SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The initial aim of this research paper was to identify the lack of civics education in America and the knowledge gap it creates not only within its citizens, but within their military counterparts and service members as well. While recognizing the limitations of this analysis, the author believes to have largely achieved its goal in highlighting the need for civics education, identifying a gap within Marine Corps PME, and tackling the first step in mitigating this deficiency. The author identified societal norms, the national education systems ideology, civilian and military leaders and efforts to counter the civics crisis, and key components for improving education outcomes and Marine facilitation of proper civics education.

Limitations in this study include lack of quantitative, measurable data from across the Marine Corps to support the need for civics education, along with the necessary time and tools to conduct such broad research. It is also difficult to engage research participants on a strictly volunteer basis. In order to capture the necessary data, the ideal method would be to have an entire TBS company of newly commissioned officers take the U.S. Citizens Civics test, as well as an entire EWS class of students, and then compare those results to not only each other but against their civilian college counterparts, resulting in data that supports the thesis and a need for civics PME.

If the author were to design this study again, he would start with engaging Marine Corps entities that can not only support the necessary research, but also have the time, manpower, and resources to put together an OPT (operational planning team). With this type of unified effort, an OPT could get the right permissions and achieve the prescribed research methods, and develop the proper type of PME that satisfies the requirement which can then be implemented in a correct and timely manner across the force. This approach will capture the importance of

## ***Master of Military Studies: National Civics Crisis Requires Junior Officer PME***

research partners within the initial stages of research design, allow for more in-depth data collection, and be more informative and convincing to the skeptic population.

In terms of recommendations for further research, it is recognized from the author's findings that the Marine Corps decision on implementing such recommended PME would benefit from further, mandatory questionnaires and surveys. Data collection across all ranks, to include other branches of service is needed in order to conclude a realistic evaluation of service members lack of civics knowledge and further test the author's proposed thesis. More methodological work is needed to capture more robust information, leading to capturing quantifiable data, and enforcing further action and engagement. It would also be helpful to capture and carry out a full cost-benefit analysis of implementing additional PME, and analyze the importance of time served versus time put towards individual education.

### **THE U.S. CIVICS TEST AND CURRICULUM**

- Test: <https://joefossinstitute.org/civics-curriculum/us-citizenship-test/>
- Curriculum and topics of study: <https://joefossinstitute.org/civics-curriculum/>

# *Master of Military Studies: National Civics Crisis Requires Junior Officer PME*

## **Bibliography**

- Ahlgren, Alyssa. College Student: My Generation is blind to the Prosperity around us. *Foundation for Economic Education*, April 2019. <https://fee.org/articles/college-student-my-generation-is-blind-to-the-prosperity-around-us/>
- Berger, David H. *Commandant's Planning Guidance* (Washington, DC: Headquarters US Marine Corps, July 2019).
- Bittner, Donald. "Curriculum Evolution: Marine Corps Command and Staff College 1920-1988," History and Museums Division Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, Washington D. C. (1988), Executive Summary, <https://www.marines.mil/News/Publications/MCPPEL/Electronic-Library-Display/Article/898275/curriculum-evolution-marine-corps-command-and-staff-college-1920-1988/>
- Bowers, William. *Making Marines in the All-Volunteer Era*. Marine Corps University (November 2018), <https://www.usmcu.edu/Portals/218/LLI/MLD/Making%20Marines%20in%20the%20All-Volunteer%20Era.pdf?ver=2018-11-27-155103-017>
- Branson, Margeret. "*The Role of Civic Education*" (A Forthcoming Education Policy Task Force Position Paper from the Communitarian Network), Center for Civic Education, 1998, Retrieved from [https://civiced.org/papers/articles\\_role.html](https://civiced.org/papers/articles_role.html)
- Coley, R.J. & Sum, A. *Fault lines in our democracy: Civic knowledge, voting behavior, and civic engagement in the United States*. Educational Testing Service, 2012. Retrieved November 2019, from [https://www.ets.org/research/policy\\_research\\_reports/publications/report/2012/jezn](https://www.ets.org/research/policy_research_reports/publications/report/2012/jezn)

***Master of Military Studies: National Civics Crisis Requires Junior Officer PME***

Commandant of the Marine Corps, *Marine Leader Development*, MCO 1500.61, July 28, 2017,

[https://www.hqmc.marines.mil/Portals/61/Users/254/50/4350/MCO%201500.61%20Marine%20Leader%20Development%20\(Spiritual%20Fitness\).pdf](https://www.hqmc.marines.mil/Portals/61/Users/254/50/4350/MCO%201500.61%20Marine%20Leader%20Development%20(Spiritual%20Fitness).pdf)

Damon, William. *The core of civic virtue*. Hoover Digest, 2011 No.3, retrieved November 2019,

from <http://www.hoover.org/research/core-civic-virtue>.

Joe Foss Institute. *Civics Education Initiative Fact Sheet*. 2019, Retrieved December 2019, from

<http://civicseducationinitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/CEI-Fact-Sheet-Aug-2019.pdf>

Murdock, Deroy. *Civic Ignorance Threatens American Liberty*. CATO Institute (June 2000),

Retrieved December 2019, from <https://www.cato.org/publications/commentary/civic-ignorance-threatens-american-liberty>

The Marine Corps: *Demographics Update*. Headquarters Marine Corps Marine & Family

Programs, 2017, file:///D:/Downloads/2017%20Demographics%20Booklet%20Jun(1).pdf