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FUTURE WAR PAPER

How to Better Educate Marine Corps Officers for the Next Conflict

**SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF OPERATIONAL STUDIES**

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Introduction

In his 2006 *Marine Corps Gazette* article titled “Teaching for the Future,” Major General Donald Gardner, the former Commanding General of Education Command and President of Marine Corps University (MCU), describes the university’s Professional Military Education (PME) continuum as a “progressive education system, for both enlisted Marines and Marine officers, that identifies appropriate areas of emphasis for each educational level while sequencing Marine Corps specific PME, joint PME (JPME), and leadership development throughout the available learning opportunities within a Marine’s career.”¹ PME is an integral part of the lifelong education process for the military, and Marine Corps Order 1553.1B titled *The Marine Corps Training and Education System* defines PME as a study of the military profession that provides Marines with the skills, knowledge, confidence, understanding, and vision to exercise sound military judgment and decision-making in battle.² The continuum allows Marines to study increasingly complex ideas over the course of their careers to apply during military conflict.

The education system is integral to advancing a military institution as it prepares for future conflicts, and in September of 2016 the Marine Corps Combat Development Command published the *Marine Corps Operating Concept* (MOC), which provides amplifying guidance to education.ⁱ The fifth critical task identified in the MOC is to “Exploit the Competence of the Individual Marine.”ⁱⁱ The task indicates that “To develop Marines for complexity, we must review our education and training curriculum to ensure we are developing Marines with the

ⁱ The document incorporates Title 10 responsibilities from the US Code, builds upon *Expeditionary Force 21* (EF21), and identifies how the Marine Corps will focus the Marine Air-Ground Task Force (MAGTF) as it conducts operations today and prepares for future expeditionary operations in the 21st century.

ⁱⁱ There are two subsections that discuss the concept of “Developing Leaders at Every Echelon,” and “Developing Marines for Complexity.”

agility and perspectives to manage uncertainty, think critically, and solve complex problems.”³

The technology gap among adversaries is quickly closing, and acquiring an intellectual edge may be the remaining variable in conflict that tips the balance of victory in the US’s direction.

In 2018, former Secretary of Defense James Mattis signed the *National Defense Strategy* and indicated his disappointment with the PME continuums across the joint force. Secretary Mattis provided his intent for continued development and indicated that “Professional Military Education has stagnated, focused more on the accomplishment of mandatory credit at the expense of lethality and ingenuity. We will emphasize intellectual leadership and military professionalism in the art and science of warfighting, deepening our knowledge of history while embracing new technology and techniques to counter competitors.”⁴ The secretary also includes the importance of PME as a strategic asset to building relationships and interoperability across the joint and allied forces. The inefficiencies that the former Secretary of Defense recognizes are apparent throughout the Marine Corps Officer Professional Military Education (OPME) continuum, and the recommended focus areas he provides allow for curriculum developers to decrease known inefficiencies.

While evaluating the current Marine Corps OPME continuum in response to the *Marine Corps Operating Concept* and the *National Defense Strategy*, the areas that offer themselves to improvement exist within the underdeveloped OPME continuum, the unlinked PME curricula, and the absence of a structured self-study program. MCU originally defined the Marine Corps OPME continuum in 2010, employing Joint PME level nomenclature vice the service lexicon, and mapping three of the school’s learning outcomes (SLO) to five learning areas.⁵ The original concept provides a valuable framework but needs re-evaluation. The OPME continuum consists of five schools throughout an officer’s career, and the schools base their curriculum development

on the 2010 OPME continuum, but they do not tightly integrate the programs between the schools which results in five separate stove-piped curricula. Finally, the self-study program is loosely defined and does not create a path for officers to focus their personal study time. The lack of guidance reduces the focus of Marine Corps learning objectives and does not complement the PME programs.

Although the continuum creates successful officers, the inefficiencies throughout the OPME program reduce effectiveness. The MOC levies many requirements on the future officer and the Marine Corps must improve the OPME continuum by re-evaluating the structure, tying the curricula of the main education venues together, and integrating a more focused self-study program between education venues to increase the intellectual edge of its officers over adversaries as the technological gap closes on the next conflict. This is achieved by studying the current construct of the OPME continuum, reviewing a case study from Australia with its recent curriculum developments, and then examining the recommendations to improve the Marine Corps continuum.

Current construct of the Marine Corps officer PME continuum

In 1989, General Alfred M. Gray, the 29th Commandant of the Marine Corps, founded Marine Corps University (MCU) to create an educational institute that focused on the study of war and the profession of arms.⁶ The conceptual roots of the university descend from the birth of the modern Marine Corps at the end of World War I, when senior leaders recognized the value of educating Marines at all levels in the art and science of war to “think critically and act decisively in the face of ambiguity, fog, friction, and chance.”⁷ In the early 1920s, the Marine Corps created an education system and offered courses at the Marine Corps Officer Training School, the Field Officers School, and the Company Grade Officers School. These three schools served

the important role of educating officers in the Marine Corps and also served as the foundation of today's Marine Corps University.

Over the decades, the courses that the Marine Corps offered adapted with the changing world, and in 1964 the Corps redesigned several of the curricula to create Amphibious Warfare School (AWS) and Command and Staff College (CSC).ⁱⁱⁱ With a need to modernize the military education system and a focus on maneuver warfare in the late 1980s, the 29th Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Alfred M. Gray, ordered the consolidation of five independent schools into a single university. With the release of ALMAR 123-89, General Gray officially activated Marine Corps University, indicating in his message that he considers PME and the development of all Marine leaders “to be of the utmost importance as we prepare to move into the 21st century.”⁸ The Marine Corps remained focused on educating a lethal fighting force, but with the establishment of MCU the Corps could now educate its force with an institutional community of scholars.

The following year in 1990, the newly established MCU created the Marine Corps War College (MCWAR) for senior-level officer professional military education. In 1999, the university reached a major milestone and acquired the authority to distribute master's degrees for three of the courses when it received accreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges (SACS). The Marine Corps continued to adapt to the changing environment at the turn of the millennium, and in 2000 the Commandant realigned focus on education and training by establishing Training and Education Command (TECOM) and Education Command (EDCOM). The official history of MCU states that “The Corps continues to emphasize the critical role of

ⁱⁱⁱ In 2002, AWS was re-designed as Expeditionary Warfare School (EWS).

professional military education in developing and maintaining a professional cadre of Marine leaders that are resilient, adaptive, innovative, and imbued with the creativity and moral values required to make sound tactical and ethical decisions.”⁹ The Marine Corps did indeed advance from the conceptual roots of a university in WWI to the establishment of a full-fledged university today, but over the years of advancement the curricula of the different schools were not closely intertwined to create an aligned and cascading effect.

In 2006, the Commanding General for Marine Corps Combat Development Command, General James F. Amos, directed an evaluation of the current Marine Corps education process. The study is titled “U.S. Marine Corps Officer Professional Military Education,” and is currently referred to as the Wilhelm study. Retired General Charles E. Wilhelm led the team of evaluators which included three retired Lieutenant Generals and two distinguished military scholars. The group evaluated a spectrum of areas across the university to include the following four main areas: the faculty, the students, the curricula, and the facilities. The study occurred with an understanding of an environment consisting of an “accelerating political, economic, technological, social and military change.”¹⁰ The changing world featured conflict with radical Islamists, increasingly instable nuclear proliferation, the continued rise of China as a threatening superpower, and a simultaneous technological revolution ascending with information-related technologies.

The study group conducted its examination asking ten overall questions across the university in relation to the changing environment. The results found the Officer PME system sound but warned that it would be quickly ineffective if the system did not adapt and improve. The Wilhelm study states that “In the past, the Professional Military Education system has never failed the Marine Corps, and the Marine Corps has never failed, the nation, in large part because

it was able to change. The need for change is even more important now.”¹¹ Organizational learning and adaptation is instrumental to the success of any military institution, and although the PME system may not have failed in the past, it requires continued change to remain relevant and prepare for future conflicts. In order to continue improving, the Wilhelm study offered the university a detailed way ahead and identified sixty-three total recommendations for continued improvement and development.

While reviewing the current environment in 2019, it is apparent that MCU made many of the recommended improvements from the Wilhelm study. In her 2015 *Gazette* article titled “Staying Focused on PME,” Commanding General of Education Command and President of MCU Brigadier General Helen G. Pratt states “If one were to evaluate the progress of the University and the implementation of the report’s recommendation, one would find tremendous progress in all four areas.”¹² It is hard to decipher exactly which improvements MCU made since there is no formal progress report, but today one can review the report and evaluate the current construct as Brigadier General Pratt did and come to the conclusion that the university corrected the majority of the recommendations.¹³ It is uncertain exactly why MCU did not complete the remaining recommendations without a follow-on report, but it is apparent that the university prioritized the recommendations so that the organization could align its assets and fulfill the most important tasks over the years.

One of the specific areas that the Wilhelm study examined was the basic structure and content of the current officer PME program. The fourth overall recommendation is to broaden the scope of institutional PME and to define the Marine Corps Officer PME Continuum.¹⁴ The report stated that the Marine Corps needs to expand the institutional vision of PME to span the entire lifetime of a Marine and “regard it as a continuum that begins before an officer enters

active service, persists as an essential part of his or her active duty daily lifestyle, and extends beyond retirement.”¹⁵ The continuum did not span the lifetime of a Marine officer then, and arguably does not now with the exclusion of Officer Candidate School (OCS) and The Basic School (TBS).

Several years after the release of the report in January of 2008, the Commandant of the Marine Corps, General James T. Conway, signed the updated Marine Corps Order 1553.4B. The update titled *Professional Military Education* articulates the entire Marine Corps PME program and outlines the officer PME program from the primary, career, intermediate, senior, and general officer categories, detailing the joint PME requirements and the authorized education venues.¹⁶ Although the order is detailed and informative, the document does not actually define the officer PME continuum as recommended by the Wilhelm study. It would take the Corps several more years to develop a detailed concept.

In March of 2010, the Marine Corps Education Command published a pamphlet titled the *Marine Corps Officer Professional Military Education Continuum*. The document is the first effort in defining the OPME continuum based on the educational model of Bloom’s Taxonomy and outlines the expectations required from graduates.^{iv} The employment of Bloom’s Taxonomy is important because it provides a framework for the Marine Corps to build the different education curricula across the continuum. The OPME pamphlet does identify required learning outcomes across the continuum which form the foundation of the academic curricula, and MCU

^{iv} Benjamin Bloom created the Taxonomy in 1956 as a hierarchical ordering of cognitive skills that assist instructors to teach students. Educational outcomes can illustrate the higher order of critical thinking based on prerequisite knowledge at the lower levels of education. The hierarchy is most commonly exhibited as a pyramid with the following categories displayed from the bottom of the pyramid to the top: Knowledge, Comprehension, Application, Analysis, Synthesis, and Evaluation.

conducts course content review boards to validate the curricula, but overall the curricula do not intertwine to make a cascading effect of educational learning objectives.

The OPME pamphlet provides an overview of the continuum, describing the primary, intermediate, and senior levels of education while also defining the educational focus of each level of war. The primary education level focuses on the tactical level of war while the intermediate level focuses on the operational and the senior level the strategic. The intent is to create a continuum that builds upon the foundation established from previous education. There are five mutually supporting learning areas that are identified in figure 1: Leadership;

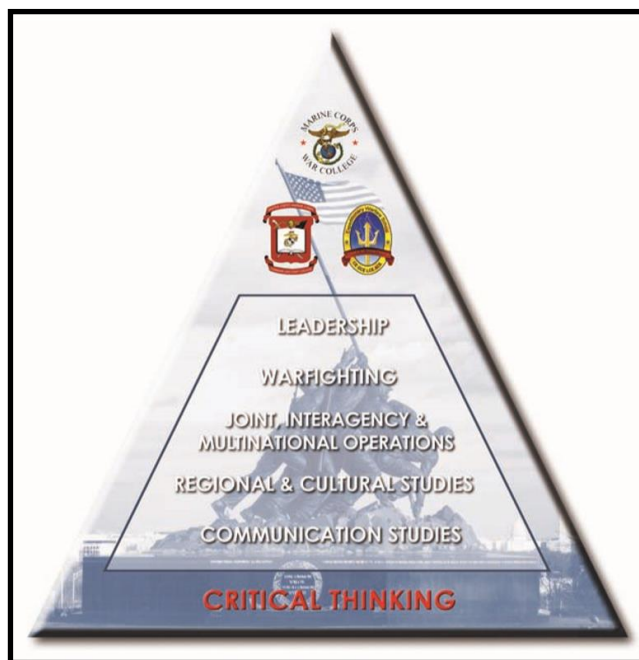


Figure 1 (Officer PME Continuum Learning Areas)

Warfighting; Joint, Interagency and Multinational Operations; Regional and Cultural Studies; and Communication Studies. Each learning area is specifically designed to enhance the critical thinking skills that allow officers to solve complex problems.

The OPME pamphlet further details each learning area in comparison to the three education levels and then defines the education levels across Bloom's Taxonomy. Although a

continuum exists, each school individually creates its curriculum using a set of SLOs that have evolved to meet requirements. The President of MCU reviews and approves the SLOs biennially at the Curriculum Review Boards (CRB) to ensure PME requirements are met and that correlation exists between the various academic programs.¹⁷ Additionally, the original OPME Continuum does not include any educational outcomes for the primary level officer corps at TBS, nor either of the joint PME levels of precommissioning or General/Flag Officer education. MCU does oversee the Executive Education Program for general officers through its Lejeune Leadership Institute; however, that program is not incorporated into MCU's CRB process.¹⁸

Overall, the Marine Corps PME program consists of resident instruction, distance education, professional self-study, and the Marine Corps Professional Reading Program.¹⁹ Self-study is traditionally conducted outside of formal settings and includes the Marine Corps Professional Reading Program, formal school prerequisite courses, distance education programs, conference participation, battle studies and staff rides, professional writing, and civilian education that further professional development and fellowships.²⁰

While reviewing the current construct of the Marine Corps OPME continuum, it is apparent that the Marine Corps has continued to prioritize PME for its leaders. From the establishment of the original schools in the 1920s, to the formation of MCU in 1989, to the conduct of the Wilhelm study in 2006, to the release of the *Marine Corps Officer Professional Military Education Continuum* in 2010, there is no doubt that the Marine Corps puts a premium on education. Although the overall education process has developed over this time, the OPME continuum is not detailed enough, the five school curricula are not tightly linked, and there is an absence of a structured self-study program. These inefficiencies reduce effectiveness of the

overall education process, and re-evaluating the structure of the OPME continuum, tying the curricula of the main education venues together, and integrating a more focused self-study program between education venues can improve the system. These improvements will increase the effectiveness of the education system and provide its officers with an intellectual edge over adversaries as the technological gap closes on the next conflict.

Case Study: Australian Officer PME Continuum

While reviewing how other allied partners are altering their education along with the current operational environment, a valuable case study exists in Australia as it contends with similar problems. In 2012, the Australian Defence Force (ADF) recognized the necessity to create a master's level education and sought the assistance of Australian National University (ANU). The university created the Military and Defence Studies Program (MDSP) to educate the mid-career officer corps during their transition from the tactical to the operational level of war and to provide Australia's future leaders with the skills to navigate through the challenges of the country's current and future security environment. The MDSP is a "fully integrated academic program balancing military, strategic and defence studies with vocational requirements created specifically for the ADF by the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre (SDSC) in cooperation with military directing staff."²¹ The postgraduate program brings together top-tier students and produces intellectual leaders throughout the Australian military to operate on the national, regional, and global platforms.

The MDSP is similar to many other nations' military intermediate-level education programs, but one of the main differences that distinguishes MDSP is the course themes. The framework of the course includes eight themes which drive the curriculum: Nature and Character of War, The Political Objective, Unity of Force, Strategic/Military Culture,

Resources/Sustainment/Capability/Force Structure, Learning and Adaptation, Operational Environment/Geography, and Leadership and Command. The instructors introduce the eight themes to the students at the beginning of the year and then employ them throughout the curriculum for the students to understand and evaluate the course content. The ADF explains that “Through these themes, students are introduced to a structured lens through which they can enhance their understanding the complex ambiguities of military and strategic studies. Tracing the themes across 72 units encourages a holistic understanding of the courses and the interdependence of the subject matter in the ‘real’ world.”²² The themes provide a framework for the course, creating continuity to an intertwined and cascading curriculum.

The MDSP received great acclaim from students and received an awarded as a program that enhances learning through the ANU Vice-Chancellor’s Award for Excellence in Education in 2016.²³ The ADF recognizes the MDSP “as the most significant academic education future military leaders from Australia and across the Asia Pacific region will receive at the mid-point of their careers.”²⁴ In 2016, the Chief of Army, Lieutenant General Angus Campbell stated that “The Australian Army is extremely satisfied with the program’s ability to prepare critical thinkers and adaptive minds for an uncertain future.”²⁵ Additionally, General James Mattis toured as an Annenberg Distinguished Visiting Fellow, and during his visit he stated his enthusiasm of the program: “Speaking at some length with your students in Canberra, it is clear that they have expanded their understanding of the fundamental nature of war and the operational art, and have done so in a joint and historical context. I wish I’d had such a course growing up in the service; they will be of great value for the rest of their careers.”²⁶ The praise illustrates the success of the program and identifies the example that MDSP provides for any military’s intermediate-level education program.

In July of 2018, the ADF expanded the MDSP concept to the entire education continuum to develop a new Joint Professional Military Education (JPME) continuum. In the 2016 Chiefs of Service Committee report, the committee indicated that “Through well-developed intellects we can identify, analyse and cohere new technologies, new concepts in Joint war fighting and new organisational constructs in order to adapt. This will ensure the ADF and Department of Defence is optimally prepared for contemporary and future operations and it allows the ADF to use what mass and capability it possesses in the best way possible to achieve national objectives.”²⁷ The ADF recognized that it lacked a coherent JPME continuum and that there was a need for an intellectual edge over adversaries as military capabilities and technological advantages decreased.

The ADF established a five-stage approach to the continuum that the Australian Chief of Defence Force endorsed.²⁸ The continuum provides the framework and guidance for all education and training venues to create the curriculum. The five stages depicted in figure 2 illustrate an officer’s career from Cadet to General and the performance required from the officers throughout. The stages progress through the officer’s career, building upon the previous years’ experience and education.

Professional Foundations	Developing Tactical Mastery	Operational Artist	Nascent Strategist	National Security Leader
Training and Years 0-4 in commission	Years 5-10 in commission	Years 10-15 in commission	Years 15-25 in commission	Years 25 onwards in commission

Figure 2 (Australian Defense Force Joint Professional Military Education Continuum)

With the five-phase foundation established across the OPME continuum, there are four core professional areas of study with subordinate themes associated with them identified in figure 3: National Policy and Strategy; Command, Leadership, and Ethics; Joint Warfighting;

and Technology and Capability. The four core professional areas of study within the continuum cover the general topics. In the 2016 Chiefs of Service Committee report, the committee indicated that the core professional areas “cover the breadth of the general theory, principles and skills to master the Profession of Arms and can be applied to the Joint Force, wider Department of Defence, Australian national security community and foreign defence forces.”²⁹ The areas of study remain constant throughout the entirety of the continuum and drive development of residential and non-residential courses.

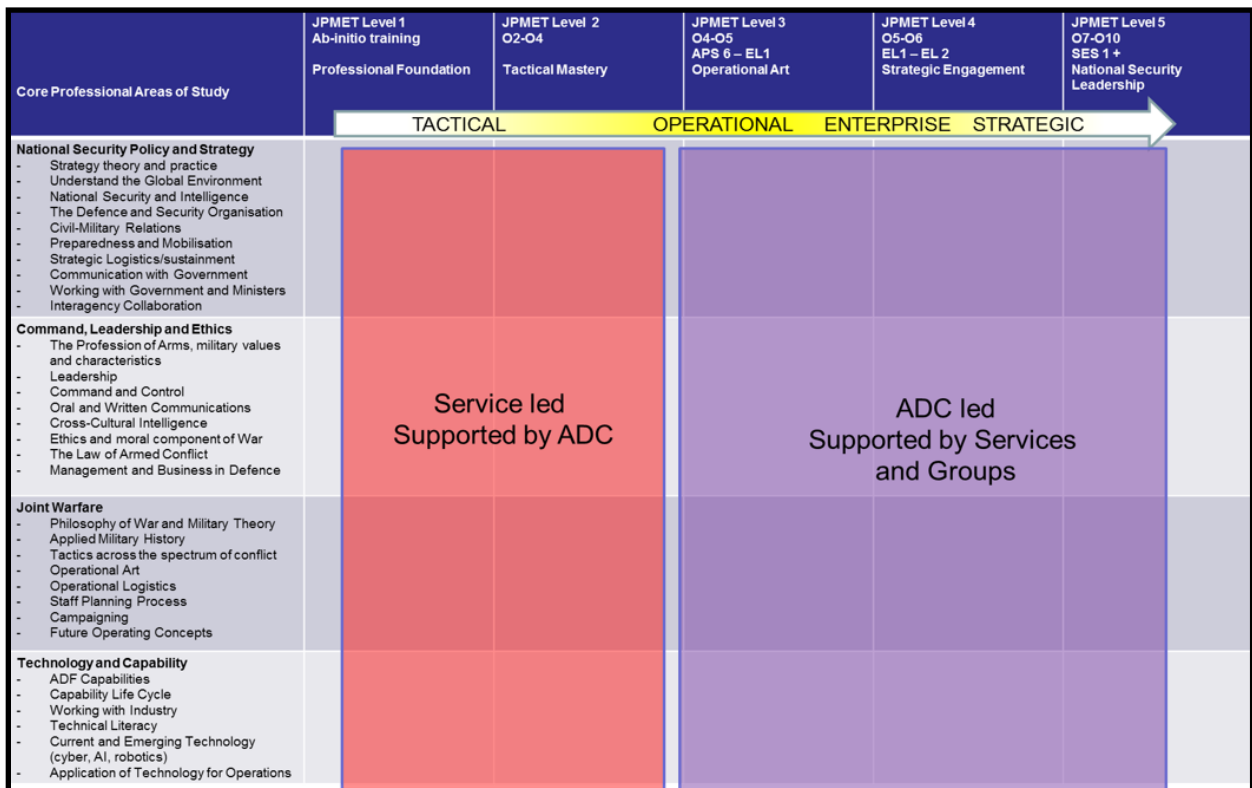


Figure 3 (Joint Professional Military Education Framework)

In all, the Australian Defence Force has focused its OPME continuum advancement over the past several years and streamlined the process to allow for efficient and effective education. ANU designed MDSP with its eight course themes, and the ADF broadened the concept to its JPME continuum, standardizing the continuum across the five phases and four core professional

areas. The ADF has an impressive plan as it looks to educate its officers to gain an intellectual edge over adversaries for their future conflict, and the Marine Corps can capitalize on some of the intellectual rigor invested into the ADF's plan.

Recommendation to Improve Marine Corps Officer PME Continuum

The Marine Corps has many of the same challenges of educating its military as the ADF, and the Corps can improve the overall OPME continuum by re-evaluating the structure, tying the curricula of the main education venues together, and integrating a more focused self-study program between education venues. Although the Wilhelm study was written twelve years ago and improvements have occurred, it is time to re-evaluate the continuum as the world evolves and adversaries continue to adapt. In the Wilhelm study, an analysis of the continuum indicates that “the necessary changes rest on a solid foundation. The basic structure of Marine Corps officer Professional Military Education is sound. The predecessors of today's leaders created a system that provides opportunities for Marine officers to be educated in a continuous and progressive fashion throughout their careers.”³⁰ This assessment still applies today as the current foundation of the OPME provides an excellent starting point to adjust from, and the Marine Corps can improve the continuum by applying the three recommended modifications.

The first recommendation is to re-evaluate the OPME continuum. The original publication of the *Marine Corps Officer Professional Military Education Continuum* provided a good initial foundation, but it is time to re-evaluate the work and advance the original concept. The primary framework for the Marine Corps OPME continuum exists in the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Instruction 1800.01E titled *Officer Professional Military Education Policy*. The chairman signed the current version in May of 2015, and the purpose of the document is to distribute policies, procedures, objectives, and responsibilities for OPME and JPME.³¹ Within

the document, the OPME continuum is defined with the following five PME levels: precommissioning, primary, intermediate, senior, and General / Flag Officer (GO/FO). It outlines each PME level in comparison to the three levels of war and provides an example of expected learning outcomes at each PME level. The levels are comparable with the ADF JPME levels and make logical sense while building an education continuum that crosses an entire officer's career. The framework that the Marine Corps uses is driven from the top down and can easily remain intact without alteration.

With the overall OPME framework established, the five learning areas that the Marine Corps employs can be re-evaluated. The Corps currently employs the following five mutually supporting learning areas identified in figure 1: Leadership; Warfighting; Joint, Interagency and Multinational Operations; Regional and Cultural Studies; and Communication Studies. The learning areas define the continued educational foundation for officers regardless of Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) and serve to enhance critical thinking and complex problem-solving skills. These five learning areas are incomplete and do not accurately depict all the areas needed to study. Furthermore, the basic learning areas do not break down into more refined focus areas, leaving too much room for interpretation. The ADF case study offers a model that better defines the categories needed to study, and provides additional detail within those categories that the Marine Corps can use to create a cascading curriculum.

The ADF uses the four core professional areas of study. The areas and their subordinate themes are identified in figure 3: National Policy and Strategy; Command, Leadership and Ethics; Joint Warfighting; and, Technology and Capability. When compared to each other, the ADF's core professional areas of study encapsulate the same areas as the Marine Corps's five learning areas, but they better define each category with thirty-two subordinate themes. Since

the ADF's four core professional areas are better defined, it is recommended that the Marine Corps use them while re-evaluating its continuum, perhaps even adopting them in their entirety. The better-defined study areas will provide an improved structure to build the curricula from and ensure the proper focus over the course of the lifelong education continuum. Regardless if the Marine Corps chooses to adapt the ADF's four core professional areas of study, at a minimum, the Corps must re-evaluate the continuum for current validity.

With the OPME continuum re-evaluated and restructured, the second recommendation is to tie the curricula of the main education venues together. Currently the curricula and SLOs for The Basic School (TBS), Expeditionary Warfare School (EWS), Command and Staff College (CSC), and the Marine Corps War College (MCWAR) reflect the framework of the five learning areas, but the current outcomes approved in 2018 do not formally re-map to ensure that they are tightly networked or interwoven to complement and build upon each other.³² The curriculum developers at the independent education venues do not integrate with each other while designing or altering their curricula so that ideas introduced at junior education venues like TBS and EWS build further upon each other at CSC and MCWAR.

The lack of integrated curriculum development builds inefficiencies into the overall OPME continuum. Integrating the curricula builds efficiencies into the programs which in turn increases overall effectiveness; it streamlines the process and reduces unnecessary redundancies. Major General Mick Ryan, Commander of the Australian Defence College states that “engagement between like-minded military institutions must improve. There is a wide array of ideas in military education being shared online - but this is not always replicated between institutions. Enhanced sharing - of best-practice curricula, of outstanding academic personnel/ new learning approaches/ and new military theories must be one of the cornerstones of our

approach to Western military alliances.”³³ Achieving this cornerstone facilitates lifelong learning and ties the education continuum together tightly. It builds on concepts taught at each educational institute and increases effective learning. The Marine Corps can achieve this cornerstone by better integrating the curricula of the five schools.

While tying the curricula of the main education venues together, entry-level education needs to be included at The Basic School (TBS). Entry-level education is defined as the initial skill training received upon entry into the Marine Corps, and it is the foundation for an integrated life-long continuum by establishing the baseline for follow-on education. As previously mentioned, the OPME does not incorporate TBS and the Wilhelm study recommended expanding the continuum to PME outside of Education Command to include the junior officer corps: “The Marine Corps confronts a number of daunting challenges in preparing the officer corps to meet a complex and difficult future. These challenges demand that Professional Military Education begin before officers come on active duty and continue throughout their careers to retirement.”³⁴ Currently, TBS is assigned to Training Command and there is discussion on re-assigning the school to EDCOM to achieve this intent. Regardless of the final decision, the intent for entry-level education is to indoctrinate and expose the Second Lieutenants to concepts that build with continued education throughout their career. The TBS curriculum can be incorporated into the continuum within either organizational structure and is an important baseline to include.

The last recommendation is for the Marine Corps to provide a focused self-study program between education venues because a noticeable deficiency exists with the overall program. Marine Corps Order 1553.4B titled *Professional Military Education* defines self-study as professional study outside of the formal classroom environment that broadens Marines’

foundation in the profession of arms.³⁵ Self-study incorporates the professional reading program, battle studies, professional writing, civilian education, or any other educational option that enhances professional development. In his *Marine Corps Gazette* article from 2012 titled “The Officer PME Continuum,” Colonel William F. Mullen III indicates that in the demanding operating environment today “the pursuit of self-study seems to have faded significantly.”³⁶ Today, Major General Mullen is the Commanding General of Training and Education Command, and he still believes that the lack of self-study is resulting in the reduction of intellectual ethos of our officers.³⁷ Self-study is a part of both the officers’ profession and the education continuum, and Major General Mullen questions whether experience and formal PME are sufficient enough to enable the professional development of officers in the anticipated complex nature of the operating environment.

If the OPME structure is re-evaluated and the curricula of the education venues are tied together, then integrating a focused self-study program will greatly improve the continuum and further network and reinforce the educational learning objectives. Ultimately the three mechanisms to PME are the individual Marine, unit commanders, and the formal school system. In his report, General Wilhelm indicates that “There are three clear components to Professional Military Education: the efforts of individual officers; the emphasis and encouragement provided by Marine commanders at all levels; and the contribution that the schools make to the intellectual development of officers.”³⁸ The individual Marine is the most important since it is the responsibility of each officer to educate themselves in their profession. Wilhelm continues, “But the Marine Corps also has responsibilities. It must guide, encourage, and support its officers in their self-education efforts.”³⁹ The Marine Corps can capitalize on self-study by providing

structured guidance and integrating a focused program that will greatly improve the OPME continuum and further network and reinforce the educational learning objectives.

In addition to a focused self-study program, the Commandant's Reading Program could be better integrated into the continuum. Currently the books in the reading program do not tie into or complement any of the school curricula. The program provides a good list of books to read, but it does not provide specific context to the reading. The program does not purposely reinforce learning outcomes from previous education venues nor prepare leaders for future education venues. This is a great opportunity for the Marine Corps to capitalize on an existing requirement and better integrate the programs together so that the self-study that Major General Mullen discusses can occur within context-dependent reading to better understand warfare.

Conclusion

In conclusion, education is important to any military organization and increasing the intellectual edge of its officers over adversaries as the technological gap closes will most likely be the tipping point to success during the next conflict. Fortunately, the Marine Corps recognized the importance of having intellectual warfighters at all ranks and created a university to achieve this concept. Marine Corps University indicates that the leadership "remain grounded in General Gray's original intent and vision, while at the same time working to identify and implement the educational advancements necessary to meet the demands of the future operating environment. The university seeks to enhance the intellectual capacity of the Corps by arming future leaders with the military judgment, critical thinking, and creative problem-solving skills necessary to out-think, as well as out-fight, their opponents."⁴⁰ General Gray's original concept for MCU is an important aspect of the university and remains relevant even after thirty years from inception. MCU must continue to focus on educating the future leaders for the next

conflict and can more effectively do so in accordance with the *National Defense Strategy* and the *Marine Corps Operating Concept* by re-evaluating the structure of the OPME continuum, tying the curricula of the main education venues together, and integrating a more focused self-study program between education venues. Attaining these three improvements will increase the effectiveness of the education system over a lifelong study of the military profession, and a more effective system will allow students to deepen their understanding of warfare which will give the Marine Corps the advantage in future conflicts.

Notes

¹ Major General Donald R. Gardner, “Teaching for the Future,” *Marine Corps Gazette* 90, no. 2 (Feb 2006): 10.

² Commandant of the Marine Corps, *The Marine Corps Training and Education System*, MCO 1553.1B, May 24, 1991, page 6 of enclosure 3.

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