

DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE
PRESENTATION TO THE COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND INVESTIGATIONS
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SUBJECT: ENLISTED PROFESSIONAL MILITARY EDUCATION

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Introduction

Thank you Mr. Chairman and members of the Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee for the chance to appear before you today to highlight the Air Force's system of Enlisted Professional Military Education (EPME). Our EPME system is successfully preparing our enlisted Airmen at the tactical, operational, and strategic level for leadership positions within the national security environment. Developing and educating our Airmen is a top priority for the United States Air Force. Our Air University, Thomas N. Barnes Center for Enlisted Education is expanding the leadership ability of enlisted members and strengthening their commitment to the profession of arms by integrating sound leadership, communication skills, and military studies principles and concepts through the curricula.

Mission

In providing relevant and responsive military education at the appropriate time in an enlisted Airman's career, EPME prepares Airmen to lead and fight in air, space and cyberspace. Through integration of institutional competencies and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS)-directed EPME requirements across the continuum of an enlisted member's career, Air Force EPME is a requirements driven process that ensures the strong link between capabilities and mission needs. EPME strengthens the abilities and skills of our Airmen to lead as tactical, operational, and ultimately strategic thinkers, planners, and warfighters.

Policy

The policy framework and authorities that form the basis of the Air Force's system of EPME are driven by CJCS guidance, contained in CJCSI 1805.01A, *Enlisted Professional Military Education Policy (EPMEP)*. This instruction outlines policies, procedures, objectives, and responsibilities for EPME to include joint programs. The overarching goal is to educate and train the right Airman, for the right task, at the right time. Additionally, doctrine remains the

foundation for EPME. Specifically, Air Force Doctrine Document 1-1, *Leadership and Force Development* addresses leadership and force development principles, and experience-based tenets rooted in all levels of the Air Force. Building upon this foundation is Air Force Policy Directive 36-26, *Total Force Development*, which defines the institutional competencies central to developing the Total Force through the tactical, operational, and strategic levels of leadership. Finally, Air Force Instruction 36-2301, *Professional Military Education*, details the management of educational opportunities for Airmen.

Air Force Enlisted PME Programs

Deliberate enlisted force development is central to the Continuum of Learning (CoL) that spans an enlisted Airman's career. Further, as a subset of the CoL, the Continuum of Education (CoE) establishes the foundation for all enlisted education program development. Complementing training and experience, education prepares professional warfighting Airmen to perform in progressively more demanding supervisor, manager, and leader positions in dynamic operational environments.

With a combined production of more than 29,000 students per year, Air Force resident EPME consists of four levels: Airmen Leadership School (ALS), the Noncommissioned Officer Academy (NCOA), the Senior Noncommissioned Officer Academy (SNCOA) and the CMSgt Leadership Course (CLC). The CLC was established in 2004 in response to an emerging Air Force need to better prepare newly promoted CMSgts with operational and strategic leadership. The CLC is an 8-day executive level course--a capstone event within the CoL that spans an enlisted Airman's career, and is required within 1-year of promotion to CMSgt. In addition to resident EPME, over 26,000 students annually complete ALS, NCOA, or SNCOA via distance learning courses. Currently, ALS and NCOA distance learning are paper-based programs and available only to the Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve members. The SNCOA distance

learning has been updated to a web-based course, and is available to the Total Force. Ultimately, on average 55,000 students, nearly 15 percent of the total enlisted force, complete EPME programs annually.

To increase our interoperability to meet mission challenges in joint and coalition environments, 85 of our Airmen attend a sister service SNCOA equivalent course each year. Additionally, for the first time, a SNCO is attending a coalition course for SNCOA PME credit. Furthermore, over 5,700 enlisted Airmen completed the Senior Enlisted Joint PME course since 2005; an additional 1,236 are currently enrolled.

Student Selection

The enlisted institutional developmental continuum identifies the EPME opportunities available throughout an enlisted Airman's career. The EPME continuum is tied to enlisted promotions timelines, Air Force Institutional Competencies, and deliberate development outlined in AFI 36-2618, *The Enlisted Force Structure*. Selection of active duty members for resident EPME is based on grade (seniority based on time in grade, time in service), promotion line number, priority, eligibility, and availability. Timing for ALS and CLC is tied to promotion to SSgt and CMSgt respectively. Airmen who cannot complete required EPME before promotion due to circumstances beyond their control (for example, remote tours, deployments, medical issues, personal hardship, Exceptional Family Member Program, etc.) may be promoted with waivers provided they attend EPME (in the next higher grade) as soon as possible.

Faculty

Selection of faculty and senior staff are key to successful implementation of EPME. Based on the school's unique mission needs, having the right faculty mix ensures the appropriate level of academic rigor and diversity. Faculty selection is based on recognized academic and operational expertise. All Air Force military faculty members are selected within the framework of the Air Force assignment system. Air University works closely with the Air Force Personnel Center or the Chiefs Group, in the Air Staff A1 Directorate to ensure highly qualified faculty members are assigned to meet the mission requirements of its schools. Each school identifies to the Air Force Personnel Center the requirements for its military faculty, working closely to ensure members being considered for faculty duty meet minimum requirements. Although military faculty manning is an ongoing challenge at all levels of EPME, we meet mission requirements by maintaining the ability to adjust student/faculty ratios.

Employing Change

The EPME curricula exceed Air Force goals for currency and relevance through a number of guiding apparatus. Curricula incorporate current doctrine to ensure students are exposed to the very latest in terms of Air Force and Joint 'Lessons Learned.' Further, the Air Force Learning Committee (AFLC), chaired by the Director, Force Development, is the gate-keeping body that validates functional requirements for EPME curricula. The AFLC, comprised of Air Staff functional experts, Major Command and Air University representatives, balances requested topics with senior leader priorities to determine which should be included in EPME programs and at what level. In addition to Air Force-specific inputs, the EPMEP and accompanying Joint Special Areas of Emphasis identify relevant topics of immediate interest to the Joint Staff to be added as appropriate and directed.

Besides doctrine and Joint policy, school curricula are also influenced by faculty subject-

matter experts across Air University and student suggestions. This feedback, shaped by current operational experiences, enhances student learning through case studies, lessons learned, and informed insights into the challenges and opportunities faced by the United States, and in particular, its military forces. Students and subject matter experts keep the curricula current, relevant, and specific to the needs of today's military professionals.

Furthermore, to ensure EPME is aligned with our priorities and force development strategies, the Air Force conducts an EPME Triennial Review. This review ensures maintenance of relevant curricula that meets applicable joint and Air Force force development guidance and policy, with appropriate educational technologies and resources to meet future mission challenges in joint and coalition environments. Overseen by senior enlisted leadership and subject matter experts, findings and recommendations identified in this process are used to employ change within the curricula. In our most recent review, the panel validated that Air Force EPME programs are delivering the required education with the right breadth and depth to enlisted Airmen at the appropriate career points. We also identified several areas for curricula improvement.

As such, this year we are revising all 4 resident and 3 distance learning EPME courses to incorporate recent revisions of the Air Force Institutional Competencies List, AFIs 36-2618 and 36-2301, and the EPMEP. The curricula revisions will also incorporate changes identified through the AFLC process. For example, incorporation of nuclear, space/cyberspace, cross-cultural competence, total force integration, irregular warfare, Air Expeditionary Force tempo bands, social and media, and resource management are being revised or integrated into the EPME curricula.

Conclusion

The role of the Air Force enlisted Airmen is constantly changing, leading to increased levels of supervisory, managerial, and strategic leadership responsibilities, requiring increased critical thinking and problem solving skills. Meeting this requirement demands a more strategic-minded

warrior Airman, with the total force, joint, coalition, and global perspective, able to effectively operate in dynamic and uncertain environments. Developing this Airman demands constant attention to a relevant and responsive continuum of learning necessary to inspire and develop enlisted leaders with the moral framework of integrity, service and excellence. Rising to the education challenge, Air Force EPME prepares Airmen to lead and fight in air, space and cyberspace by constantly evolving to balance the role of the enlisted force, the needs of the Air and Joint Forces, and the global operating environment.