

Chapter 37

SENIOR SERVICE EDUCATION

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“Not to promote war but to preserve peace by intelligent and adequate preparation to repel aggression.”

—*Elihu Root, US Secretary of War, 1903¹*

Introduction

This chapter discusses the selection process for senior service education and the options available for completing the training. Senior service education represents the Department of Defense’s highest level of an officer’s professional military education or military education level.² This education prepares senior military officers to be strategically minded joint leaders ready for assignments at the joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational levels.² Options for this education level include attending a senior service college (SSC), either as a resident student or in a distance learning capacity, or attending a fellowship program. Students must be focused, motivated, and disciplined to thrive within the various senior service education programs and obtain maximum benefit no matter the route (Figure 37-1).

Selection

The Army conducts selection for senior service education through a competitive centralized board process, similar to a promotion selection board, at the Human Resources Command (HRC). The Army annually conducts one selection board for branches that fall within the

operations, operations support, force sustainment, and information dominance components; separate boards for each of the specialized branches (the Army Medical Department [AMEDD], Judge Advocate General, and Chaplain Corps); and a board for Army Reserve forces.³ Lieutenant colonels and above who have completed their intermediate-level education are eligible to compete for SSC selection.² The initial selection opportunity occurs 1 to 2 years after promotion to the rank of lieutenant colonel. To be considered for SSC selection, eligible officers must opt-in and review their record to verify its accuracy through the My Board File on HRC's My Record Portal website.⁴

The AMEDD receives a limited number of resident SSC authorizations each year, approximately 24 this writing time. The centralized school board reviews the eligible AMEDD officers' board files and selects the best-qualified officers within each branch. Officers chosen for senior service education as a "principal" then rank their preference of the available resident SSC and fellowship options before the slating process. The locations currently available to AMEDD officers for resident senior service education are listed below.⁵

Senior Service Colleges

- Army War College (AWC), Carlisle Barracks, PA
- Dwight D. Eisenhower School for National Security & Resource Strategy, Fort McNair, Washington, DC
- Naval War College, Newport, RI
- National War College, Fort McNair, Washington, DC
- Air War College, Maxwell Air Force Base, AL

Fellowships

- Secretary of Defense Executive Fellowship with placement at a leading corporation (location varies)
- Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Policy and Planning, Washington, DC
- Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology, Washington, DC
- Department of Veterans Affairs, Washington, DC
- George Washington University School of Public Health and Health Services, Washington, DC

- The University of Georgia, Infectious Diseases and Population Health, Athens, GA
- George Washington University School of Public Health, Washington, DC
- Harvard University, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Cambridge, MA

Resident Education Program

The Army War College offers students a traditional classroom setting through seminars taught by military and civilian professors and instructors. Each seminar group comprises a diversity of students from across the Army branches, individuals from the joint services and interagency departments, and international military officers.

The AWC provides instruction through five core courses: (1) strategic leadership, (2) theory of war and strategy, (3) national security policy and strategy, (4) theater strategy and campaigning, and (5) defense management. In addition to the five core subjects, resident students participate in:

- a regional studies program;
- a strategic research project;
- national security staff rides to Gettysburg, New York City, and Washington, DC; and
- elective courses based on the student's interest.

Through this curriculum and completing the strategic research project, students earn a master's degree in strategic studies and receive Joint Professional Military Education (JPME) level 2 credit.^{2,6}

US Army War College Fellowship Program

Through placement in leading universities, government institutions, and renowned corporations, the AWC fellowship program provides an educational experience that cannot be obtained through traditional resident SSC education.⁷ As fellows, officers are afforded unique personal and professional educational opportunities to study and critically evaluate broad national security policy, strategy, interagency affairs, civil-military relations, and operational issues.² Fellows also

act as Army ambassadors, engaging their host organization through formal and informal engagements. The fellows' experience in the program helps prepare them for positions in highly complex and ambiguous environments.⁶ Resident fellows complete a strategic research project; however, the fellows' program does not provide an opportunity to earn a master's degree, and fellows do not receive JPME credit (Figure 37-1).



Figure 37-1. Lieutenant Colonel Kane Morgan (left) and Colonel Amy Jackson (right) stand in front of the Army War College Lantern during their Army War College Fellowship 2019–2020 academic year orientation. Colonel Jackson completed the fellowship with George Washington University School of Public Health and Health Services, and Lieutenant Colonel Morgan completed the fellowship through the Secretary of Defense Executive Fellows program.

Lessons Learned and Tips for Success for the Fellowship Program

Officers selected for the AWC fellowship will benefit from participation in academia, industry, and policy, with a considerable amount of autonomy. Each fellow will have a tailored and individualized experience based on their host institution and location. The first recommendation is to maximize the opportunity to network and meet AWC staff during orientation. There will be ample opportunity to attend local conferences and other events. Numerous fellows will operate out of the National Capital Region (NCR); therefore, making a fellowship network to collaborate and share items of interest can be helpful. The fellowship director will send out email highlights identifying think-tank events and various other opportunities in the NCR. Visits to the White House, Pentagon, Brookings Institute, Department of Veterans Affairs, Defense Health Agency, Defense Health Headquarters, and many other NCR based places are opportunities for exploration. It is also a good idea to join the Association of the US Army (AUSA), which holds an annual conference and offers a breakfast series, forums, and a lecture series. AUSA members will receive notification of such events.

Next, given the autonomy a fellow will have, it is essential to begin developing goals and objectives, and create a battle rhythm to stay on track with reading, research, and writing. The fellow will have the opportunity to read rather than skim material, and it will be useful to develop a reading list with a mixture of subject matter. A fellow will do well to dedicate time to writing and reading daily, particularly for the two assigned scholarly writing projects, the first with a length of 1,500 words, and the second about 5,000 words (Figure 37-2). To prepare for the writing projects, a fellow should invest in the citation source manual identified by the AWC and consider purchasing a year's subscription to a manuscript editing software program. Grammarly, a software program that can be downloaded for individual use, provides online grammar, spelling, sentence structure, and plagiarism checks.⁸ This tool will help the fellow with the finer points of writing. There are also reference and file-sharing tools available that can assist in managing references and allow collaboration. Refer to Chapter 32, The Role of the Physician Assistant in Research, for examples of reference management and file-sharing tools. The benefits vary depending on the selected product, and the decision on which tool to use is a personal preference.



Figure 37-2. Colonel Amy Jackson (center) meets with several subject matter experts from the Force Development Directorate at the Combined Arms Support Command and Sustainment Center of Excellence at Fort Lee, Virginia, in April 2020. Colonel Jackson conducted meetings and networked with multiple agencies as part of her fellowship project in investigating the strategic sustainment of water in multi-domain operations.

Initiating the writing process can be very daunting, and fellows may not know where to start. A successful researcher will identify subject matter experts within a selected topic field to conduct initial data gathering and confirm the subject's value. An outline should then be created, followed by a literature review, which involves gathering all of the documents, articles, regulations, books, and any online sources regarding the topic. The researcher should place these sources into an internal library or collection where they can be easily managed. The researcher should then note key findings by highlighting or copying and pasting pertinent data into a literature review spreadsheet to track the relevant points. This tactic will help in putting the paper together and citing sources with page numbers. A final piece of advice is to have an academic "lifeline," someone who is well versed in research and writing and will spend the time to shepherd the fellow along in the process.

Distance Education Program

AMEDD officers selected by the SSC board as an "alternate" and not activated for resident attendance may have the opportunity to achieve

their senior service education through the AWC's distance education program. The AWC's resident and distance education programs offer equivalent curriculums. Distance education students will also earn a master's degree in strategic studies and may be eligible to receive JPME level 1 or level 2 credit.⁶ Officers offered the distance education program must accept or decline before the next SSC selection board. If the officer is accepted in the distance learning program, they are not eligible for future SSC boards. Officers who are not accepted into the distance learning may re-compete in future SSC school boards, but there is no guarantee of their selection as a principal or an alternate (Figure 37-3).



Figure 37-3. Colonel Jeffrey Oliver, Lieutenant Colonel Roberto Marin, Lieutenant Colonel James Paimore, and Lieutenant Colonel Dawn Orta during their Army War College graduation ceremony at Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania, in July 2018. The graduates attended the distance learning program.

Lessons Learned and Tips for Success for the Distant Education Program

Applying for distance education is a decision best made after self-reflection and guidance from mentors, family, friends, and prior SSC graduates. Completing senior service education, whether through the resident course, fellowship program, or distance education program, is not a guarantee of promotion, command, or strategic positions, but it helps. The time spent in distance education needs to be allocated against current military and family requirements and responsibilities; therefore, the individual is committing to balancing work, family, and course work. If selected, students should devote themselves to completing the course, beginning with the orientation weekend designed to set expectations and provide guidance on achieving work-life balance and succeeding in the first year.

It is crucial to keep up with the readings during the course and build a focused battle rhythm. Based on the time requirements, the student must know their capabilities and limitations. On average, students should prepare to dedicate 12 to 15 hours a week to the AWC program. They should set a schedule for study and writing and be creative with time management. For example, while reading or listening to study material, a student can run, walk, or use a stationary bike. Take periodic breaks as needed, but completion of assignments before the due date is a must. Classes usually continue through holidays, but extra time is built in to allow for flexibility. An advantage of the distance education program is applying what is being learned immediately and developing the core skills needed for critical, creative, and strategic thinking.

Post-Senior Service Education

Officers incur a 2-year active duty service obligation upon completion of the program.⁹ The Office of the Surgeon General's talent management office individually manages graduates of resident SSC or fellowships, and these officers can compete for nominative positions through the marketplace process. This oversight ensures that strategic leaders are assigned to appropriate jobs that best utilize their experience, knowledge, and skillsets. Examples of these assignments include senior leadership positions within the Office of the Surgeon General or the

Defense Health Agency, executive leadership positions within medical commands and medical treatment facilities, placement with Army or joint commands, or interagency or multinational organizations.

Conclusion

Senior service education provides officers the opportunity to prepare for the demands of leading in an increasingly complex strategic environment and ever-changing Army. In addition to the academics and research knowledge gained, the associations and contacts made in the senior service education environment are advantageous. The combination of education and relationship building helps prepare individuals for the joint and interagency environment in which post-senior service education officers will serve.

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