

Chapter 8

ATTENDING INTERMEDIATE LEVEL EDUCATION

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Introduction

Intermediate level education (ILE) broadly describes the US Army's formal education system for field-grade, mid-career Army officers preparing to serve in staff and command roles. ILE is achieved through the Command and General Staff Officer Course (CGSOC), either through resident courses, distance learning, or a combination of these programs. CGSOC programs include officers from other US military services, foreign military services, and civilian interagency leaders who intend to operate in Army, joint, interagency, and multinational environments as commanders and general staff officers.¹ CGSOC is similar to ILE programs in other services, such as Air Command and Staff College education for Air Force officers, and the US Navy College of Naval Command and Staff. Pathways to complete ILE through the US Army include:

- 10-month resident CGSOC at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.
- 14-week resident courses at satellite locations.
- 18-month distance learning course through independent study, the Total Army School System (TASS) reserve schools option, or a combination of both.

Resident Staff College

Resident CGSOC lasts 44 weeks across three curricular components: (1) the CGSOC Common Core (16 weeks), (2) the Advanced Operations Course (16 weeks), and (3) electives (12 weeks).² The Common Core curriculum aims to broaden the perspective of junior majors from the tactical level to an operational level and includes seven blocks, culminating in oral and written exams:

- Foundations
- Strategic Studies
- Operational Studies
- Army Operations
- Managing Army Change
- Rise of the Western Way of War
- Leadership: Forging Success in Uncertain Times³

The Advanced Operations Course prepares officers to build and lead operational and tactical formations in unified land operations and covers the following subject areas:

- Today's Operational Environment
- Full Spectrum Operations
- Theory of War and Doctrine
- Conduct of War
- Commandership³

The elective curriculum provides students the opportunity to enhance their learning while conducting advanced studies in focus areas, across 192 class hours.² Students complete courses in an experiential learning environment that yields adaptive, self-aware, field-grade leaders of character and competence who are capable of shaping the joint operational environment.¹ The instruction is designed to develop students' critical and creative thinking skills, decision-making ability, character, self-awareness, leadership skills, and teamwork approaches to solving complex problems from a systems perspective.¹

Supervision

Participants are assigned to the CGSOC US Student Detachment (USSD) at Fort Leavenworth, in student status, and placed into one of approximately 64 staff groups, each with 16 students under a group advisor.² A staff group consists of officers from multiple branches and various services or governmental agencies, with one or two representatives from multinational partners. Only one Army Medical Department (AMEDD) officer is in each staff group.

Roles and Duties

While assigned to the USSD, each officer participates in a leadership position within the student chain of command. These positions range from small group leader to class president, and all are designed to assist with the daily management of the staff group. Additionally, there are multiple opportunities to serve in various other volunteer positions, some of which result in elective credits toward graduation. Some of these positions include:

- class historian,
- yearbook editor,
- triathlon director,
- adjutant officer,
- international student sponsor, and
- sports and recreation director.²

Desired Skills and Attributes

Applicants compete for attendance under the Army special branches ILE selection board, based on the following requirements and desired attributes:

- rank of major or captain promotable;
- Captain Career Course graduate;
- extensive experience as a physician assistant (PA) and AMEDD officer, with working knowledge of the military decision-making process;
- robust oral and written communication skills;

- strong work ethic and ability to work both independently and in a group, and
- desire to think critically about the military's strategic issues.

Training and Coursework

The Fort Leavenworth ILE experience challenges AMEDD students with daily intellectual exercises, rigorous academic assignments, complex problem-solving, impassioned peer-to-peer interactions, and broad exposure to joint, interagency, and multinational perspectives. AMEDD students will be asked not only to represent the AMEDD, but also to operate well outside the normal boundaries of a medical officer within the structure and framework of an Army staff. ILE faculty members intend to produce the field-grade officers soldiers deserve: tactically proficient, professionally competent, intellectually grounded, organizationally skilled, ethically sound, and readily able to exercise disciplined initiative in a brigade, division, corps, or joint headquarters.²

The first 7 months of ILE residency are particularly demanding and typically require 8 in-class hours per day and 3 to 5 additional hours of reading and homework. During this time, students participate in the Common Core and Advanced Operations Course curricula, which culminate in a joint exercise with international exchange students who travel to the United States to participate.

After completion of the Common Core and Advanced Operations Course, students proceed to the 8-course elective portion. They choose elective programs or courses of study based on personal interest and professional stewardship, such as:

- Graduate degree program focus, culminating in the Master of Military Art and Science (MMAS) degree or other graduate degrees through Kansas State University, the University of Kansas, or another partnering university.²
- Homeland security studies focus, offering students the opportunity to develop expertise in the area of homeland security.^{2,4}
- Certificate in Overseas Contingency Operations–Planning, providing students the opportunity to develop expertise critical to the execution of stability operations and reconstruction and stabilization missions.^{2,4}

- Foreign language program, providing formal language instruction in a language of the student's choice, or based on projected postgraduation assignments.^{2,4}
- International exchange and fellowship programs with the Australian, French, German, or United Kingdom staff colleges in conjunction with the completion of a regional studies certificate.^{2,4}
- Defense Support to Civil Authorities (awarding additional skill identifier [ASI] 7A), which trains officers to navigate the challenges of multidisciplinary and interagency roles in global humanitarian assistance/disaster response, emergency operations, and interoperating with National Guard and reserve components.^{2,4}
- Joint planner (ASI 3H), which trains students in the Joint Operation Planning and Execution System (JOPES) and supporting information technologies.^{2,4}
- Space activities (ASI 3Y), which trains the student on the capabilities, functions, and organizations performing military space missions.^{2,4}
- Air operations officer (ASI 5U), which develops the skills for becoming an air operation officer through the joint firepower course.^{2,4}
- Historian (ASI 5X), which educates students on the unique skills to serve in positions as Army historians, instructors, and history detachment members.^{2,4}
- Strategic studies graduate (ASI 6Z), which prepares officers for future assignments dealing with national security and military strategy.^{2,4}
- Red teaming (ASI 7J or 7G), which trains the student on the ability to enhance mission accomplishment by looking at problems from the perspective of the adversary, multinational partners, or alternative strategies.^{2,4}

Additional Resident Information

- The resident ILE website is <https://usacac.army.mil/organizations/cace/cgsc/cgss#>.
- Attendance requires a permanent change of station (PCS) to Fort Leavenworth (see information for inbound students at <https://usacac.army.mil/organizations/cace/cgsc/inbound>).⁴
- Attendance incurs a 2-year service obligation upon completion. Graduates are normally placed in an operational utilization tour of duty using the skills and knowledge developed during training.⁴

- AMEDD students may be credentialed at Munson Army Health Center at Fort Leavenworth, with participation in half-day clinics (preferably two to four times a month).
- Upon notification of selection to the resident ILE course, applicants have 30 days to accept or decline the assignment.⁴
- Applicants should consider moving their family to Fort Leavenworth; the post is very family-friendly, and many students who do not bring their families regret it. On-post housing for unaccompanied officers is also available. If planning to live on post, call the housing office at Fort Leavenworth as early as possible.
- Complete the required online preparatory courses, which include online tests, writing samples, and significant required doctrinal readings.
- Prior to the start of the Common Core, AMEDD officers additionally complete a 2-week on-site prep course review of tactics, symbology, operations planning, and introduction to Army warfighting challenges.²
- Consider whether to pursue an MMAS or master's degree from a civilian university. This work is in addition to ILE coursework.²

Common Core Satellite Campuses

The CGSOC satellite campuses are located at Fort Belvoir and Fort Lee, Virginia; Fort Gordon, Georgia; and Redstone Arsenal, Alabama (Figure 8-1).⁵ Officers from operations support, information operations, and institutional support career fields join AMEDD officers who attend with board-selected reserve component, National Guard, and special branch officers such as judge advocate generals and chaplains. In total, 12 satellite cohorts per year receive the identical 3.5-month CGSOC Common Core curriculum. AMEDD typically receives 108 satellite campus seats annually.⁵

Satellite Course Administration

Selected students attend in either temporary duty (TDY) or TDY en-route status and stay in centrally funded lodging. All TDY students are directed to use dining facilities, and are entitled to daily meals and incidental expenses.⁶ TDY student personnel actions, including leave and finance, are managed by their home unit.^{5,6} Limited TDY en-route



Figure 8-1. Major Garrett Larson, APA-C, and Major Lydia Zellers, PA-C, completed Intermediate Level Education through the satellite resident program at Fort Belvoir, Virginia, in March 2020. Photograph courtesy of Major Larson.

student actions can be forwarded through the satellite campus to Fort Leavenworth for processing. Non-emergency leave during the course is not approved, except during holidays or weekends. Throughout satellite course attendance, students should not perform work activities related to their home or gaining unit. Personal or professional TDY during ILE (eg, conference or change of command ceremony attendance) is not approved unless general/flag officer requests are sent to the Combined Arms Center commander. Students attending in TDY status from duty stations outside the continental United States will not have tours curtailed or extended.⁶

Students are not eligible to attend CGSOC if currently flagged for failure to pass a record physical fitness test, or are noncompliant with Army body fat standards.² Temporary profiles are not authorized for incoming students unless due to pregnancy.

Satellite Course Training and Coursework

Four groups of 16 students, from multiple branches and various services, comprise each satellite course. There are typically two or three AMEDD officers in each group. A faculty group adviser leads each group, and the senior ranking student is the student group leader. The following additional duties are available:

- personnel officer
- supply officer
- technology officer
- safety officer
- after-action review officer
- homework officer
- social coordinator
- physical training coordinator
- photography coordinator

The typical satellite course training day is 0800 to 1500 hours, with plenty of free time provided for reading and reflection.² Organized small group physical fitness training is mandatory. Self-development undertakings such as journal article publication, scholarly projects, and physical fitness events are highly encouraged and rewarded.² The Common Core curriculum at satellite campuses, which differs from the structure at Fort Leavenworth, includes the following nine blocks of facilitated experiential learning instruction²:

1. CGSOC Foundations
2. Political and Strategic Environment
3. Joint Operations and Unified Action
4. US Army Doctrine
5. Joint Planning
6. Force Management
7. History
8. Leadership
9. Exams: a computer-based final exam and a rigorous oral board exam

Common Core Distance Learning

The Common Core distance learning (CC-DL) course is completed through independent study. Students are given access to the three phases and the same nine Common Core blocks. Distance learners use non-facilitated instruction to work independently on the Blackboard Learning Management System. Each phase represents a separate “course” in the Army Training Requirements and Resources System (ATRRS), to be completed sequentially. Students are assigned faculty advisors who monitor and support their progress through the course. Army Regulation 350-1 authorizes students 18 months to complete the course, although completion time varies by student, and depends largely on time invested by students.⁷

Total Army School System Common Core Option

Students may also enroll in the US Army Reserve TASS course option, called Command and General Staff Officer Course–Common Core (CGSOC-CC).⁵ This option provides US Army Reserve students with a resident-like CGSOC experience. The TASS option is also a three-phase course. The DL and TASS phases of instruction are nearly identical, allowing students to move between either online or TASS instruction. Students enroll in the TASS version of the Common Core course in the same manner they would CC-DL, by applying for the TASS option through ATRRS.⁵ TASS organizations include CGSOC-certified instructors to teach the course. For the most up-to-date information, refer to the ATRRS course catalog, www.atrrs.army.mil/atrrscc/, course number 701-1-250-ILE-CC.

Phases 1 and 3 are conducted in two ways:

1. Two-week resident courses at Fort Dix, New Jersey; Camp Parks, California; Fort McCoy, Wisconsin; Hawaii; and Germany.
2. Distance learning.

Phase 2 is conducted in two ways:

1. “2 × 8”: 2 days a month for 8 months, October through May, at approximately 45 locations are across the United States, including Puerto Rico.

2. TASS accelerated “4 × 4”: 4 days a month for 4 months, at seven locations across the United States, beginning the second quarter of the fiscal year.⁵

Awards

Resident

- George C. Marshall Award (distinguished graduate)
- Arter-Doniphan Award (highest grade point average)
- CGSOC Iron Major Award (physical fitness course)
- Grierson Award for Excellence in Strategic Studies (top strategist)
- MacArthur Military Leadership Writing Award
- Arter-Darby Military History Writing Award (tactical)
- Simons Center Interagency Writing Award
- Outstanding MMAS Thesis
- Excellence in Joint Command, Control, Communications, Computer and Intelligence (JC4I) Writing
- Homeland Security Studies Award
- Father Donald J. Smythe Award (military history)
- Master Tactician
- Master Logistician
- Harris Leadership Award (instructor nomination)
- Excellence in Joint Service Warfare Award

Satellite course

- General John J. Pershing Award (top graduate in each CGSOC satellite course)^{2,8}

The Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation

The Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHINSEC) is a tenant unit on Fort Benning, Georgia, located in the community of Columbus, Georgia.⁹ WHINSEC was established in 2001 and codified in Title 10 USC, §343, as a Department of Defense training and education institution.^{9,10} WHINSEC advances democratic principles and promotes interoperability, human rights, and US customs and traditions. These goals are achieved by providing security and defense training to partner nations through partnerships with academic institutions, and by fostering relationships with senior officials from

the Americas and the Caribbean.¹⁰ Of the several courses held at WHINSEC, the School of Professional Military Education delivers a 10-month in-residence CGSOC. Similar to the in-residence CGSOC offered at Fort Leavenworth, CGSOC at WHINSEC is conducted once every academic year.^{2,9,10} Students completing CGSOC at WHINSEC achieve the professional military education ILE requirements for intermediate-level officers.²

Facilities and Class Structure

Generally, the 64 students attending CGSOC at WHINSEC are a combination of US and international officers in the rank of major (O-4) or lieutenant colonel (O-5), as well as interagency and intergovernmental civilian equivalents. Students are divided into four groups of 15 or 16 officers led by a faculty group advisor. Each group has approximately an even distribution of US and international students, with only one AMEDD officer in each group. The CGSOC at WHINSEC provides state-of-the-art classrooms in Bradley Hall that are nearly identical to those in Fort Leavenworth. Students have access to support facilities and reference facilities at the Maneuver Center of Excellence.^{9,10} For most US students, this is their initial exposure to a joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational environment.

Training and Education

CGSOC students receive the same training and education as those attending CGSOC at Fort Leavenworth. However, CGSOC at WHINSEC does have some differences; most notably, the course is taught entirely in Spanish, and students are fully immersed in the Spanish language (although English-language study materials are provided).⁹ Therefore, US students selected to attend CGSOC at WHINSEC are required to demonstrate Spanish language proficiency with a rating of at least “2” in both listening and reading, annotated in Section V, Foreign Language, on the officer record brief. Eligible US military students earning a Spanish language proficiency rating of “1” or higher in both listening and reading may receive up to \$400 in foreign language proficiency pay throughout their academic year.^{11,12} A DA Form 4187, Personnel Action, is generally required to schedule the Defense Language Proficiency Test 5 at a nearby military installation education or testing office.^{11,12} CGSOC at WHINSEC also includes additional

classes on human rights, the rule of law, due process, civilian control of the military, and the role of the military in a democratic society.⁹

Faculty and Staff

The faculty and staff that make up the instructors for CGSOC at WHINSEC include military personnel from the different US services, military personnel from the Americas and Caribbean, and a foreign service officer from the Department of State. Guest lecturers include representatives and senior officials from Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the Department of Homeland Security, Department of Justice, Drug Enforcement Administration, United Nations, and various US universities.⁹

Additional Opportunities

Students may pursue the following additional educational opportunities while attending CGSOC at WHINSEC:

- **MMAS.** Enrolled CGSOC students may apply for admission into the MMAS program, which requires a choice of electives and an independent research project approved at the department director level. Students are also eligible to compete for CGSOC resident student awards upon submission of their MMAS thesis.⁹ The MMAS may only be pursued while enrolled in the resident CGSOC.⁹ Additionally, students attending CGSOC at WHINSEC have a unique opportunity to apply up to 18 hours of their CGSOC coursework to simultaneously earn a Master of International Relations in partnership with Troy University.¹³
- **School of Advanced Military Studies.** Graduates of CGSOC are eligible to apply to the School of Advanced Military Studies Program and earn a Master of Art in Military Operations.^{2,9}

Attending CGSOC at WHINSEC allows for building camaraderie, establishing relationships, and further fostering the relationship between the United States and partner-nations of the Americas and Caribbean.⁹ Nearly twice a month, and sometimes more often, events called “bocadillos” are held. Translated as “luncheons,” bocadillos are an opportunity for partner-nation students to introduce regional cultures and customs through sharing popular food and drinks from their

country. WHINSEC offers an excellent opportunity for PAs to operate outside of their comfort zone, through exposure to a joint, interagency, intergovernmental, multinational environment. WHINSEC also offers the Army ASI 3H, Joint Planner, which trains students in the JOPES and its supporting information technologies.⁹

Lessons Learned and Tips for Success

- Prior to beginning formal ILE coursework, consider themes or challenges from the AMEDD or broader military context to serve as a focal point for study and research.
- Review doctrinal publications, ranging from tactics and leadership to the Army operating concept.
- Maintain a portfolio of written work and resources throughout ILE to aid future professional development.
- Review a personal learning skills inventory to identify the manner in which learning best occurs prior to starting coursework.
- ILE courses include well-established lecture series, allowing students to learn directly from and interact with general officers, leaders, and policy makers in the Department of Defense and legislative and executive branches of government.
- Expect to study hard, develop new relationships, and interoperate with peers from diverse branches, services, functional areas, and nations.

Conclusion

ILE provides a way for AMEDD officers and PAs to expand their roles in strategic- and operational-level planning and leadership contexts. ILE represents a capstone educational experience for developing skills and addressing shared challenges in a diverse peer group, whether in person or online. While ILE centers on the personal and professional development of staff officers, this unique opportunity crucially supports and underwrites the role of PAs throughout the joint and multinational operating environment, today and in the future.

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