

**INTERSESSION:**  
*The Triumph of Athens over Sparta  
at The United States Military Academy*

Intersession and Its Success  
Compared to the Intended Outcome of  
The 1989 Middle States Accreditation Study

LD 720  
The American Military Experience  
and the  
United States Military Academy

Captain Mark C. Shade  
Tactical Officer Education Program  
18 November 1998

Time is arguably the most precious resource in any organization. The military, and more specifically the Army, tries to combat the shortage of time by developing a list of essential tasks. The Mission Essential Task List (METL) with accompanying Battle Tasks focus leaders on items that are most important in accomplishing the goals and mission of the unit with limited resources. METLs not only focus leaders, but also act as embedding mechanisms by telling subordinates what is most important. The United States Military Academy defines its mission as follows:

*To educate, train and inspire the Corps of Cadets so that each graduate is a commissioned leader of character committed to the values of Duty, Honor, Country; professional growth throughout a career as an officer in the United States Army; and a lifetime of selfless service to the Nation.*

The mission to develop “commissioned leaders” for a “career as an officer in the United States Army” would lead one to believe that the most important aspect of the education at West Point would be its military training. Simultaneously one would therefore conclude that the last program that would get diminished or eliminated would be the military development program. This was not the case when the United States Military Academy eliminated Military Science from its academic semester curriculum and developed the concept of intersession in 1990.

Time was the principle factor that led to the establishment of intersession at the United States Military Academy. This is evident when one traces the events that led up to the adoption of intersession and reviews the perceived problems with the “cadet experience” prior to intersession. The advent of intersession was meant to alleviate or eradicate these problems. Unfortunately, intersession failed to alleviate the problems it was intended to correct at the Academy.

Military intersession at West Point is rooted in the strategic planning project that Lieutenant General David R. Palmer, Superintendent of the United States Military Academy from 1986 to 1990, began in 1986. Initially, his efforts were relatively informal attempts to answer three fundamental questions: Why does America have USMA? What does USMA do to fulfill its purpose? How does USMA accomplish its mission?<sup>1</sup>

The answers to these questions eventually formed the basis for the Academy's strategic guidance for the future, later recognized as only the first of three major stages in the entire project. Stage one consisted of developing the strategic guidance. Stage two consisted of performing several major, introspective self-studies based upon the strategic guidance. And finally, stage three consisted of efforts to implement the changes decided upon during stage two.

Stage one developed a purpose statement for the Academy that determined the nation expects West Point "to provide the nation with leaders of character who serve the common defense."<sup>2</sup> The obvious next step in stage one was to examine, and in this case change, the Academy's mission. After changing the mission, the leaders at the Academy determined it necessary to attempt to predict what characteristics future Army leaders must possess on a more lethal, dispersed battlefield. To answer this question, USMA leaders formulated a concept paper entitled *The Army Leader of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. The authors organized the paper into three sections—what the leader must be, what the leader must know, and what the leader must do. West Point would instill the characteristics

---

<sup>1</sup> United States Military Academy, *Preparing for West Point's Third Century: A Summary of the Years of Affirmation and Change, 1986-1991*. (West Point, New York, June 1991).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

required by a leader in the volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) environment of the future, thus fulfilling its primary mission, through its three developmental programs—academic, military, and physical—which comprise the West Point experience.

After expending approximately one year completing stage one—the strategic guidance—West Point invested an additional two years completing stage two. During these two years the Academy completed a large number of introspective, self-study projects. These projects were designed to determine whether the institution was well-positioned (in terms of programs, organization, faculty, facilities, and other resources) to be and to do in the future what it had set for itself as a target in the just-completed strategic guidance. The objective was to identify and reaffirm strengths that appeared to be taking USMA in the desired direction, while rectifying weaknesses that were not. The studies included the following areas:

1. Formal two-year academic accreditation self-study
2. Redesign of (enrichment of) the cadet experience
3. Leadership development changes
4. Academy schedule
5. Office of Leader Development Integration
6. Graduate program in leader development for Tactical Officers
7. Honor reviews
8. Certification of cadet development
9. Fourth Class System reviews
10. Planning of physical plant and facilities
11. Redesign of the engineering curriculum
12. Reorganization of the academic departments
13. Admissions review
14. Competitive sports review
15. Restructuring of Academy staff
16. Historical-mindedness review
17. Directorate of Academy Advancement

The first study listed above, the formal two-year accreditation self-study, was the centerpiece of stage two efforts and is the next link to establishing military intersession.<sup>3</sup>

In the fall of 1987, USMA took formal steps to begin preparation for the upcoming decennial accreditation visit in 1989 by its accrediting agency, the Middle States Association of Secondary Schools and Colleges (MSA). The MSA required schools to conduct a self-study prior to their arrival and provide a copy of the study to members of the accreditation team. In an effort to facilitate this major self-study, the steering committee organized eight subcommittees to examine the following categories: leader development program coordination, cadet life, academic program, military program, physical program, faculty and teaching, the master's degree program, and outcomes assessment. In December 1988 these committees produced a significant, three-volume report that was organized by strengths and weaknesses within each area reviewed. This three-volume report would later be known as the Interim Report of the Middle States Accreditation Steering Committee.<sup>4</sup> As expected the MSA renewed the Academy's accreditation, but this report produced far reaching effects by initiating changes in all aspects of the West Point experience.

It is important to note that the Interim Report of the Middle States Accreditation Steering Committee grouped a myriad of activities under the military program. Basically if a program at the Academy was not directly related to academics (other than military science), and with the exception of some physical development programs, the committee grouped the program under the military program umbrella. Thus the military program consisted of chain of command duties, military science, intramurals, Commandant's hour,

---

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

athletic support, drill and ceremony, and other areas to include tactical officer and Sequential Leadership Development System (SLDS) counseling.

With that in mind, the accreditation steering committee found that the military program at West Point was a fundamentally sound program, guided by a clear institutional purpose—to develop leaders of character. The committee did however express concern with the continuity and consistency of the military program. This concern centered on the rotation of Commandants through West Point in two- to three-year intervals. The committee thought this tour length was barely enough time to become conversant with the overall military program, and certainly not enough time to provide the long-term leadership necessary to properly integrate the military program with the other programs that compete for cadet time.<sup>5</sup>

The committee also expressed concern that each Commandant may arrive at West Point with an agenda—whether a personal one or one directed by the Army Chief of Staff—such as: “. . . put the ‘M’ back in USMA.”<sup>6</sup> Each new agenda would lead to new programs implemented during any semester with little regard for their impact on existing programs, whether military, physical, or academic. The committee cited as an example the addition of the SLDS program, that added a substantial reporting and counseling requirement to the list of cadet duties, without the removal of any equivalent program. In addition, Military Science courses now expected an hour of preparation on the cadets’ part prior to each hour of class. The bottom line for the committee was that programs

---

<sup>5</sup> United States Military Academy, Middle States Accreditation Steering Committee, *Interim Report of the Middle States Accreditation Steering Committee, Volume II*. (West Point, New York, 20 DEC 1988).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 14-18.

were being added, all to accomplish military objectives, without the removal of programs that required equivalent time and effort.<sup>7</sup>

Based on this conclusion, a subcommittee examined the issue of the quantity of military programs, focusing on the sufficiency of cadet time. Restricting its analysis of time versus quantity issues to the academic year, the subcommittee set out to determine whether cadets could accomplish all of the then-current components of the military program within the available time. The subcommittee quickly determined that the issue of the use of cadet time was confusing.

The subcommittee experienced tremendous difficulty in trying to determine the amount of time per day required for the military program during the academic year. The subcommittee therefore attempted to determine the amount of time cadets typically spent on military program tasks. The subcommittee then compared this figure to time allocated to the military program in an attempt to try and identify how much the military program was infringing on time allocated to other aspects, namely the academic program, of cadets' lives. A limited number of cadet hours existed in a day, and when one program exceeded its allocation of these hours other programs, and probably the overall quality of the USMA experience, would suffer.<sup>8</sup>

The subcommittee revealed through the 1988 First Class Questionnaire and the Cadet Schedule Questionnaire that cadets felt very strongly about the importance of the military development program. Cadets tended to rank the military development and physical fitness programs ahead of the academic program in terms of importance. Given

---

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> United States Military Academy, *Proceedings of the Academic Board-USMA, NO. 105, JUNE-DEC 1989*. (USMA Archives, West Point, New York, 1990).

these results, the committee hypothesized that in a situation in which a severe time shortage existed, cadets were likely to devote their time 1) in areas that they considered most important, and 2) in the areas where contingencies for punishment were the greatest, most immediate, or most certain. This hypothesis proved valid as cadets revealed in the surveys that they were likely to perform chain of command duties before both academic requirements and physical development activities.<sup>9</sup>

The importance of the military program to cadets was also evident in their responses on the questionnaires regarding striving for excellence. More cadets strove for excellence in the military development arena than any other area. Seventy-nine percent of cadets responded that they strove for excellence in military development as opposed to only 51% of cadets who reported seeking excellence in all three developmental programs.

The subcommittee coupled these findings with the fact that military programs tended to provide the most immediate repercussions for unsatisfactory performance, leading the committee to develop a real concern that the military program was infringing on the academic development of cadets. Failure to successfully accomplish chain of command or military duties typically resulted in immediate consequences, whether in counseling or demerits. The committee contrasted this to contingencies for failing to meet daily requirements for academic courses that evaluate performance by assigning grades based on periodic examinations. To give even further credence to the subcommittee's fears, 72% of all First Class cadets and 41% of all cadets reported frequently using study time to accomplish chain of command duties.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> United States Military Academy, Middle States Accreditation Steering Committee, *Interim Report of the Middle States Accreditation Steering Committee, Volume II*. (West Point, New York, 20 DEC 1988).

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

All of these factors led the subcommittee to determine that the military program held an inordinate amount of power over cadet lives that infringed on time allocated to other dimensions of the West Point experience. It recommended a constant emphasis in insuring that the military program did not force cadets to produce quality results at the expense of other programs. The perceived infringement on time allocated to other dimensions of development led to a review of the cadet experience, known at the time as Project Enrichment.<sup>11</sup>

Project Enrichment grew out of the findings of the accreditation self-study that one of the major weaknesses at West Point was the accumulation of excessive demands on cadets. These total demands exceeded the ability of the average cadet to complete them at a level commensurate with their capabilities. The study determined that the Academy demanded in excess of 80 hours of duty time per week from the average cadet. It subsequently determined that because cadets could not spend 80-plus hours per week on duty requirements, they were forced to curtail their performance elsewhere. The study concluded that the academic program was the area in which cadets typically sacrificed performance for other pressing duties. In light of these findings, the Superintendent declared a requirement for a new model of the cadet experience that maintained the quality of the physical and military programs while enhancing that of the academic program.<sup>12</sup> The central goal of Project Enrichment was based on the theme that "a reduction in total program demands is required to increase quality and that the level of cadet achievement in academics is less than it ought to be, given academy goals and the

---

<sup>11</sup> United States Military Academy, *Preparing for West Point's Third Century: A Summary of the Years of Affirmation and Change, 1986-1991*. (West Point, New York, June 1991).

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

qualifications of entering cadets. The major recommendation . . . is that the Academy use a four-year perspective to review the weight of effort assigned to each program during each period of the year.”<sup>13</sup>

The result of Project Enrichment was a complete reorganization of the West Point schedule. Project Enrichment reorganized the typical cadet week, the typical cadet year, and the entire 47-month cadet experience. The Academy inserted a two-week block of time between the two academic terms each year. The Academy labeled this time Military Intersession and designated it to occur during the first two weeks after cadets' Christmas leave to provide cadets concentrated instruction in military science and physical education. The Superintendent thus removed Military Science from the academic semesters. As a result of this change, the Academy shifted graduation exercises to a later date in May. In addition, the third and fourth summers of the typical cadet experience were enhanced by adding approximately three weeks for elected “enrichment” activities. These enrichment activities were learning activities in each program in which a cadet could choose to participate to supplement baseline requirements. The Academy required cadets to choose one summer enrichment activity based on personal preference. In addition, it gave cadets the option to enrich in any program during the academic year, at a sacrifice of their discretionary time, to take elective courses in any program above the 40-baseline course requirement required for graduation.<sup>14</sup> This meant that cadets could choose to take additional courses—possibly even in Military Science—if they desired.

---

<sup>13</sup> United States Military Academy, *The Superintendent's Annual Historical Review, 1989*. (West Point, New York, 1990), 106.

<sup>14</sup> United States Military Academy, *Preparing for West Point's Third Century: A Summary of the Years of Affirmation and Change, 1986-1991*. (West Point, New York, June 1991).

In a review of greater detail by program, the results of Project Enrichment in the Academic Program included several changes. The Academy kept the core curriculum intact, while reducing the study-in-depth component from a baseline of 44 to 40 academic courses.<sup>15</sup> As previously stated, all military science courses were moved into intersession to reduce the load carried by cadets during the academic year, resulting in a total load of not more than five courses per term unless the cadet elected to take more. Cadets desiring to enrich in the academic program, that is choose to pursue an academic major, would take an additional one to four courses depending on their program's requirements. This would result in a course load of six classes in some terms. The Academy would also offer some academic courses in the summer as enrichment opportunities for all cadets instead of just for cadets who failed previous coursework.<sup>16</sup>

The military program was likewise altered in several ways as a result of Project Enrichment. The Academy would offer Military Science electives during academic semesters while reducing the hours devoted to professional development during the academic year. The Commandant's office would initiate a system of enhanced credit for military training programs resulting in more pre-commissioning requirements being met by established programs such as Cadet Field Training (CFT). The Department of Military Instruction (DMI) would utilize academic instructors both during intersession and during summer training. The Commandant's office would also validate some requirements for cadets possessing prior service in the military while expanding opportunities to gain military experiences through increased Military Advanced

---

<sup>15</sup> United States Military Academy, Office of Institutional Research, *Project Enrichment: Alternative Model*. (West Point, New York, 5 May 1989).

<sup>16</sup> United States Military Academy, *Preparing for West Point's Third Century: A Summary of the Years of Affirmation and Change, 1986-1991*. (West Point, New York, June 1991).

Individual Development (MIAD) opportunities. The Academy would amend cadet pass and leave policies to more closely resemble those in the Army. And finally, the faculty at West Point would revise mentoring and counseling requirements to ensure that they did not adversely impact on academic requirements.<sup>17</sup>

The Academy also altered the Physical Program. The Academy moved one-fourth of the physical education (PE) instruction during the Fourth-Class year into intersession while changing the upperclass cadets' PE requirement from 5-each, 9-lesson courses to 2-each, 18-lesson courses available during both the academic year and intersession. Additional PE elective courses were made available during the academic year and intersession. Cadets were also offered additional opportunities, during their third and fourth summers, to participate in activities such as the Olympic Training Center internship, Outward Bound, Master Fitness Trainer (MFT) augmentation at Fort Benjamin Harrison, Olympic Sports Festival (for invited participants), and the Advanced Sports Development Course taught predominantly at West Point by USMA faculty.<sup>18</sup>

The new model of the cadet experience was very similar to the one initially proposed by the Superintendent during his initial guidance to the members of the Project Enrichment committee. When General Palmer directed on 28 April 1989 that academic courses consist of 40 hours spread over a 16-week semester, that DMI remove all military science instruction from the academic semesters, that the Academy establish a two-week military intersession, and that the summer training program last 11 weeks, the intended resultant goal was clear. General Palmer and the Project Enrichment committee assumed

---

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

the reduction in these programs would decrease cadet hour requirements per week from approximately 80 to 70 hours. Consequently, the reduction on demands of cadet time would enable cadets to obtain a higher quality of achievement in the academic program. Simultaneously, while the academic program benefited from these changes, the military program would greatly be enhanced and cadets would receive not only better, but also more military development instruction.<sup>19</sup>

When asked in an interview whether military intersession accomplished what he had hoped when he proposed it, General Palmer responded with an emphatic "yes." In attempting to counteract the argument that intersession significantly diminished the military element of the curriculum at West Point and was just the latest example in the chipping away at the uniqueness of the Academy by making it more like a high-quality civilian institution, General Palmer produced several arguments.

According to General Palmer, the Academy now teaches *more* military science, not less. As an additional benefit, the entire faculty is now involved in teaching it. He perceived a great benefit to cadets in learning platoon tactics from their History professor. They not only suddenly realize that the professor is a soldier, but they start to mesh the military and the academic and the physical. He went on to answer the valid question of how it is better.<sup>20</sup>

General Palmer would not attempt to answer whether it is better to take a course and spread it out over a semester as opposed to squeezing it into two weeks. He

---

<sup>19</sup> United States Military Academy, *The Superintendent's Annual Historical Review, 1989*. (West Point, New York, 1990).

<sup>20</sup> Palmer, David R., LTG, "Oral History Interview," interview by Dr. Stephen B. Groves (West Point, New York, 13, 17, & 24 June and 3 July 1991).

recognized that individuals more versed in education would argue both ways. According to General Palmer, regardless of which way is better, the fact was that in the West Point environment, when military science was taught as part of the academic semester, cadets did not take it seriously and commit themselves to achieving excellence. He insisted that when cadets faced studying military science material and having a paper due the next day, cadets did not study military science. In light of this argument, General Palmer concluded that even if one believes spreading Military Science out over a semester is a better way to teach it, the Academy was getting very little return on its investment with this method.<sup>21</sup>

In General Palmer's view, West Point is now teaching more military science than it was prior to intersession. Four intersessions during a cadet's experience results in eight solid weeks of focusing on the military during the academic year. This is based on his belief that instructors cover the material just as well as before, if not better, without distractions. In addition, because everyone is wearing BDUs and thinking militarily all day long, instructors can cram more into cadets' heads, and more of the material lodges and stays.<sup>22</sup>

General Palmer also contends that the Academy is teaching more military science because intersession freed up the opportunity to teach military electives, a feat that could not occur previously. General Palmer contends that the advent of intersession has led to teaching *more* military science in a more effective way because everyone at West Point is involved during intersession—which is a positive message within itself, electives now exist in military science and other military studies, and the Academy now possesses the

---

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

ability for a cadet to take a field of study in military science. General Palmer concluded the discussion on intersession by questioning, in light of all the changes listed above, "how *anyone*, who is looking at that objectively, can say we have cut back on our approach to military science? That's just a lot of B.S."<sup>23</sup>

Major General David A. Bramlett, Commandant of Cadets at the United States Military Academy from December 1989 to June 1992, offered similar comments on intersession. In response to the question of whether the relegation of military science to a two-week intersession says anything about the attention given to the "M" in USMA, General Bramlett responded with some interesting comments. In his view, intersession was the right way to go, and the involvement of the faculty was a tremendous boost to the program. When Military Science was sprinkled throughout the year and had to compete with a Physics partial review (PR) or a design project, cadets would "blow it off."<sup>24</sup> In somewhat of a more general comparison over the history of the Academy, General Bramlett termed the idea that somehow the "M" has been taken out of USMA as "ludicrous."<sup>25</sup> General Bramlett seemed to avoid directly commenting on the effectiveness of intersession by generalizing military training to the entire West Point experience.

When General Bramlett compared the present military programs with the programs of his days as a cadet, he concluded there was no comparison. In his view cadets receive much more military exposure and training than he ever did as a cadet. The

---

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Bramlett, David A., MG, "Oral History Interview," Interview by Dr. Stephen B. Groves (West Point, New York, June 1992), 22.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

real military training at West Point is the regimentation of the experience. Cadets derive most of their military virtue at West Point by managing time and functioning under duress. Parades, intramurals, intercollegiate sports, PRs, classroom attendance, exercising leadership responsibilities, all that in the aggregate is the military experience. According to General Bramlett, military training is confused with wearing a helmet, carrying a rifle, jumping out of an airplane, rappelling out of a helicopter, or working at CTLT/DCLT. It is much more than that. In light of this view, the Academy is much more "military" than it was 25 years ago.<sup>26</sup>

To lend credence to this view, General Bramlett cites the training programs in the summer as being much better. This is most evident in the masterstroke of having the cadre teach and run more of Camp Buckner than the support battalions from the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division or the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division. This initiative by General Palmer was a tremendous insight to a leadership opportunity that the Academy missed for decades. Arguably, according to General Bramlett, being on the cadre at Buckner is the best military training for a cadet prior to commissioning that the Academy possesses.<sup>27</sup>

Before analyzing the effectiveness of military intersession, one should review one additional study. Project Proteus was a study launched in the 1980s to examine the early career preparation, experiences, and commitment of female and male West Point graduates. The Science Research Lab conducted this study by gathering data solicited from recent graduates already on active duty in the Army. Project Proteus asked respondents to assess each of the five pedestals (academic, physical, military leadership,

---

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

social, and moral/ethical) of their West Point training.<sup>28</sup> This paper will only review the findings of the project as they relate to the academic, physical, and military programs.

Comments on the problems with West Point academic training were focused on two general areas. The first was the generally negative reaction to the focus on high level organizations and management in their Military Science classroom training. This sentiment set the tone for more specific comments that training should focus on areas that would help second lieutenants adjust to and perform in their first assignments. Proposed training included additional training in supply, accountability, maintenance, specific branch training, and additional duties. The concern for more useful training was the dominant theme raised in comments about the academic program.<sup>29</sup>

The second general problem was a dissatisfaction with the overall academic program, expressed mostly in terms of the relationship of the academic program to graduates' then-current job situation. The fundamental complaint was that academic training was not useful in the performance of Army jobs. Specific proposed changes included increasing the amounts of training in military justice (UCMJ, especially separations), military writing, and courses in psychology and counseling. With few exceptions, respondents suggested that academic training at West Point be more functionally oriented toward the problems second lieutenants face during their first two years of active duty.<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> United States Military Academy, Science Research Lab, *Project Proteus: Early Career Preparation, Experiences, and Commitment of Female and Male West Point Graduates*. (West Point, New York).

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

Almost all comments about physical education at West Point were positive. The general feeling among respondents was that West Point had prepared them for any physical challenge they were likely to face in a peacetime Army.

The emphasis in comments on military training centered on problems and issues in dealing with people. Primary among these problems was dealing with non-commissioned officers (NCOs). Respondents wanted more realistic previews on what to expect from a typical NCO and better training on dealing with NCOs. Most concluded that more contact with a broader spectrum of NCOs while at West Point would have made significant, positive contributions to their adjustment as officers. Additionally, respondents wanted the military program to teach them what to do about a myriad of problems to include low quality or unmotivated troops, personal problems, superiors with low standards, superiors who are more concerned about "politics" than mission or who threaten them with a poor OER, etc.<sup>31</sup>

The overwhelming concerns of respondents in their discussion of West Point training were to bring about changes that would help future officers perform better in their initial assignments. As a recap, the areas of greatest concern were: 1) interaction with NCOs; 2) dealing with "problem" lower grade enlisted soldiers; 3) supply and accountability; 4) maintenance; 5) training in counseling; and generally 6) training on "what platoon leaders do."

Project Proteus determined that in the minds of the respondents, the linkage between dissatisfaction, poor performance, and West Point training was clearly established. The study therefore concluded that strong consideration should be given to

---

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

the suggestions offered by the respondents. Specifically, the Academy should initiate curriculum changes that incorporate training that will improve junior officer performance in the areas mentioned. Such changes would have the ultimate outcomes of improving performance, satisfaction, and presumably commitment. It is important to note that the respondents were mindful of the difficulties and trade-offs needed to bring about such changes.<sup>32</sup>

The findings of Project Proteus would lead one to believe an increased emphasis, if not an increased quantity, of military training was required at West Point to counteract the shortcomings of the preparatory training received by recent graduates. Although some aspects of the suggestions made in the report by the respondents were incorporated in the curriculum, it seems many were not. The most recent MS402 curriculum removes many of the aspects instituted, most notably supply accountability and maintenance which are now taught as Officer Professional Development (OPD) sessions by cadets.<sup>33</sup> The answer to the respondents' desire to have increased interaction with NCOs materialized with the advent of TAC NCOs in the Corps of Cadets. In the midst of a military downsizing, West Point felt the personnel crunch much like the rest of the Army. Faced with the unlikely probability of receiving more slots for faculty, the advent of intersession allowed the Academy to strip slots from the Department of Military Instruction (DMI), while creating TAC NCO positions.<sup>34</sup> Whether these NCOs would

---

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> United States Military Academy, Department of Military Instruction, Military Science 402 Course Group, *The MS402 Course Material Company Commander Handbook (Draft)*, (West Point, New York, November 1998).

<sup>34</sup> Patrick Toffler, COL (Retired), interview by author, 12 October 1998, West Point, New York.

better serve future officers in the manner intended by the respondents as TAC NCOs or Military Science instructors remains a debatable topic.

In 1998 the Academy once again began preparation for its decennial accreditation review. Much like the 1989 Middle States Accreditation Steering Committee, the Academy created a committee in 1998 to perform several introspective self-studies that the MSA requires. One of the major subcommittees created was the Leader Development Work Group, broken down further into three subgroups: Character; Assessment; and Balance, Coordination, and Integration (BCI). The BCI studied and produced reports on the Cadet Leader Development System (CLDS), time, extracurricular activities, Office of Directorate of Intercollegiate Athletics (ODIA), intersession, Academy organization, and the role of the tactical officer. Members from the Commandant's office, members of various academic departments, and the Corps of Cadets were represented in the BCI subgroup. All subcommittees completed their reports. These reports will eventually comprise The 1999 Middle States Self-Study Report.<sup>35</sup>

The Balance, Coordination, and Integration subgroup assessed whether or not military intersession is effective. The subgroup reviewed the 1989 Middle States Accreditation Report, which found that most cadets did not have the time to pursue academic excellence, so the cadet schedule was revamped to give them that time. The Academy cleared the deck during the academic year by instituting intersession to allow cadets to fully commit themselves to academic excellence. At the same time, Academy leaders were cognizant of the fact that they were committing to at least minor degradation

---

<sup>35</sup> M. Meese, LTC, BCI subgroup member, interview by author, 20 November 1998, West Point, New York.

in the military science courses. The mission of the subgroup was to determine if the degradation found in 1998 is acceptable.<sup>36</sup>

One of the most striking findings of the BCI subgroup was in the area of cadet workload. Cadets were continuing to spend a large amount of time in pursuit of success in their academic, military, and physical development programs. The report revealed that cadets spend approximately 85 hours per week on work. This is even higher than the results of the 1989 cadet time survey that initiated the revamping of the cadet schedule. As stated previously, the self-study report of 1989 recommended reducing the Academy total planned time in academic trimesters from 80 to 70 hours per week. Obviously this attempt was unsuccessful despite intersession and the accompanying changes to the developmental programs. Similarly, the BCI report concluded that the recommendation by the self-study in 1989 to increase the proportion of total planned time to the Academic Program during the Academic trimester has not been successful.<sup>37</sup>

Another interesting finding by the BCI subgroup related to time was how cadets use their time. Data received from the series of eight focus group interviews determined that cadets spend their time on daily routine activities (such as chain of command and military duties) often at the sacrifice of academic study, physical activity, personal business, and sleep. Cadets consistently reported that a lack of time due to competing requirements is the leading reason for not achieving goals in specific developmental programs. All cadets responded that they would like more discretionary time and said they would use it in one of three ways: study more, sleep more, or conduct more social

---

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> United States Military Academy, Leader Development Work Group, Balance, Coordination, and Integration (BCI) subgroup, *Military Intersession Effectiveness (Draft)*. (West Point, New York, 1998).

activities. First and Second Class cadets however, especially those in leadership positions, often responded that if they were given more time they would spend it on chain of command duties.<sup>38</sup> This data further reinforces the argument that military intersession and other changes in the military development program did not change the expenditure of cadet time in pursuit of academic excellence.

Unlike the 1989 Middle States Accreditation study, the BCI subgroup recommended that Academy officials accept a high workload. The group felt that it would be difficult, if not impossible, to reduce the workload which cadets will voluntarily accept. The group concluded that motivated, high-achieving cadets will probably continue to work an average load of 80-85 hours per week. As mandatory requirements are relaxed, cadets will find other activities in which to participate and continue to have an arduous and full schedule.<sup>39</sup>

Directly addressing intersession, the BCI subgroup found several aspects of the reconfiguration that have been successful. First of all intersession has freed three to eight hours per week during each semester of the academic year. Whether actually used for them or not, intersession has created the *opportunity* to spend this extra time on academics. Some cadets have utilized that time on academics, chain of command duties, personal fitness, or extracurricular activities. Secondly, use of academic instructors has enhanced their stature as military role models and demonstrated a commitment of the entire faculty to the military program. Finally, moving military science from the academic semester to intersession has allowed for a much greater (although admittedly shorter and narrower) concentration on military subjects. The lack of competition with

---

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

the academic program during intersession alleviates the problem of military courses suffering at the expense of concentration on other academic courses.<sup>40</sup>

The BCI subgroup also determined several problems with intersession. The study claimed that these problems have undercut the training and affected cadet perception of the entire military program. The first problem area addresses the consensus among key military program leaders that intersession is noticeably expedient, that it is a "catch-as-catch-can" operation, and that cadets do not take it as seriously as they should. In fact, these leaders believe that the obvious expedient nature of intersession diminishes the status of the entire military program. Common cadet comments on intersession feedback documents such as "we get firehosed," "it's a lousy idea," "four hours of class lead to spec and dump," "this is too important to our professional development to jam into two weeks," and "intersession makes me want to resign" all lend credence to that argument.<sup>41</sup> These comments are similar to the initial After Action Review (AAR) comments received on intersession in 1990.<sup>42</sup>

In addition to its noticeable expediency, and despite efforts by Academy leaders to label intersession as the main effort during its scheduled time period, significant distracters marginalize the courses. Department of Military Instruction leaders perceive the academic departments as sometimes hard to work with, and that they fail to furnish the branch specific personnel DMI requires to teach its courses. Also, military science classes do not have a monopoly on intersession. Other classes, some tangentially military

---

<sup>40</sup>United States Military Academy, Leader Development Work Group, Balance, Coordination, and Integration (BCI) subgroup, *Military Intersession Effectiveness (Revised)*. (West Point, New York, 1998).

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> United States Military Academy, Office of Institutional Research, *Military Intersession File* (West Point, New York, 1990-1998).

and some not, detract from the strict military focus of intersession. Finally, last year Corps squad teams took at least 17 away game trips that caused cadet athletes to miss at least one day of instruction. This imparts to every cadet that military intersession takes a back seat to varsity sports. This undermines the entire military program.<sup>43</sup>

Another problem area discovered is a lack of quality instruction. A significant number of cadets thought their teachers were substandard. Because its staff was stripped as cited previously in the paper, DMI must coordinate for 288 new instructors every year—some from far-flung reserve components—and attempt to standardize their efforts in an average of four hours of instructor preparation time. Instructors teaching outside their branches often do not possess the expertise or the credibility with cadets to effectively teach classes. Some get dismissed outright by cadets, and instruction suffers. The huge intersession workload effectively exhausts DMI resources and precludes effective assessment of instruction. All too often DMI course coordinators must trust and hope that instructors are performing well. If they are not, it is usually not discovered until the course is over and the damage has been done.<sup>44</sup>

Ironically, intersession has also created in the military program the same problem that it was supposed to solve in the academic program. Because intersession is so packed with instruction, homework, physical training, leadership training, and other requirements, and because it has to cover such a large amount of material in a very short time, cadets do not get the opportunity to immerse themselves in their studies. This mode of instruction, commonly referred to by cadets as “firehosing” them with information and

---

<sup>43</sup> United States Military Academy, Leader Development Work Group, Balance, Coordination, and Integration (BCI) subgroup, *Military Intersession Effectiveness (Revised)*. (West Point, New York, 1998).

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

them "spec-and-dumping," adversely impacts student enthusiasm and is detrimental to long-term learning. The four-hour length of intersession classes also detracts from student learning. A high number of cadets reported losing enthusiasm and concentration during these long class periods despite breaks, and especially in light of the fact they are accustomed to 55-minute classes.<sup>45</sup>

Intersession is classroom-bound due in part to the winter period, but mostly because of the need to teach much material in a short period of time. This results in cadets not being afforded the opportunity to put classroom learning into field practice. Despite the efforts by some instructors to mitigate the problem, intersession can be generally classified as book learning unreinforced with practical exercise. This often results in a failure to adequately comprehend the subject matter, or if it is comprehended it quickly vanishes. This problem is multiplied by the lack of continuity between intersession and summer field training. Twenty weeks have passed by the time a cadet gets to put into practice material learned in intersession, a time during which the material has most likely been forgotten. Instruction needs to be sufficient to pass cadets over a threshold beyond which they have committed the material to long-term memory.<sup>46</sup>

The current intersession period fails to allocate enough time for instructors to do much more than broach concepts or familiarize cadets with basic equipment. There is insufficient time to teach important new military topics such as computer simulations and force digitization. The BCI group identifies this as not only a problem now, but also one

---

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Jeffrey W. Long, MAJ., *Critically Assessing Military Intersession*, 17 January 1990, a memorandum thru the Office of the Dean, for Office of Institutional Research in the Office of Leadership Development Integration, found in the Office of Institutional Research, USMA, West Point, New York.

that USMA will have to act upon in the near future to ensure graduates receive proper introductory training in these two burgeoning areas.<sup>47</sup>

Finally, it seems the primary bill payer for intersession is the faculty at an eventual cost to the academic program after all. A thorough instructor spends a large amount of preparation time on the course he or she is teaching, resulting in intense work for such instructors.<sup>48</sup> Simultaneously, academic preparation for the spring semester suffers. This, however, is not the only way the decision to adopt intersession has adversely affected the academic program.

The Academy has reinstated mandatory requirements for military subjects during the academic year. This has been accomplished by the introduction of additional military knowledge requirements enforced by cadet and tactical officer chains of command, additional military science topics taught during Commandant's Hour (MS "C" classes), and Unit Training Time consisting of common tasks and other subjects during the academic semesters. Unlike formal military science classes that have programs of instruction (POI) and formal assessment methods, these military augmentations vary in quality and are difficult to assess. Cadets in the 1998 time survey report that some of these classes are good, some a waste of time, and some are not accomplished at all. First and Second Class cadets reported that these activities take a significant amount of time, while the effectiveness of the programs is inconsistent. The bottom line is that the 1989 changes concentrated military training in two weeks to free up time during the academic

---

<sup>47</sup> United States Military Academy, Leader Development Work Group, Balance, Coordination, and Integration (BCI) subgroup, *Military Intersession Effectiveness (Revised)*. (West Point, New York, 1998).

<sup>48</sup> United States Military Academy, Office of Institutional Research, *Military Intersession File* (West Point, New York, 1990-1998).

semesters, and the Academy has since replaced that discretionary time with additional, mandatory military activities.<sup>49</sup>

The findings of the BCI subgroup were that the current January intersession is marginally adequate and that there has been a definite downside to the post-1989 arrangement. The report continued to state that “intersession violates some of the basic rules of pedagogy and Army training, and cadets have conceived a generally negative opinion of it.”<sup>50</sup>

It is apparent that intersession has not effectively alleviated any of the problems it was intended to as identified by the Interim Report of the Middle States Accreditation Steering Committee. Cadet time requirements have not been reduced, and now actually exceed what they were prior to intersession. Cadets continue to sacrifice academics to complete chain of command duties. A very small percentage of the Corps of Cadets utilizes electives to “enrich” themselves by taking additional military science courses during the academic year (only 12 cadets from the Class of 2000 selected a Military Arts Field of Study).<sup>51</sup> And perhaps most tragic of all, the military development of future Army leaders at West Point has suffered in terms of both quality and image that detract from training and, worse, turn cadets off to the profession of arms. Unless the standards of the United States Military Academy have been reduced to accept a “marginally effective program,”<sup>52</sup> then intersession must be labeled a failure.

---

<sup>49</sup> United States Military Academy, Leader Development Work Group, Balance, Coordination, and Integration (BCI) subgroup, *Military Intersession Effectiveness (Draft)*. (West Point, New York, 1998).

<sup>50</sup> United States Military Academy, Leader Development Work Group, Balance, Coordination, and Integration (BCI) subgroup, *Military Intersession Effectiveness (Revised)*. (West Point, New York, 1998).

<sup>51</sup> Kelley, Thomas, MAJ, interview by author, 27 October 1998, West Point, New York.

<sup>52</sup> United States Military Academy, Leader Development Work Group, Balance, Coordination, and Integration (BCI) subgroup, *Military Intersession Effectiveness (Revised)*. (West Point, New York, 1998).

## Bibliography

### Primary Sources

- Bramlett, David A., MG. "Oral History Interview." Interview by Dr. Stephen B. Groves, (West Point, New York, June 1992). Office of the USMA Historian, West Point, New York.
- Long, Jeffrey, W., MAJ. *Critically Assessing Military Intersession*, 17 January 1990. A Memorandum thru the Office of the Dean, for Office of Institutional Research in the Office of Leadership Development Integration, Office of Institutional Research, USMA, West Point, New York.
- Meese, M., LTC, Sociology Department, USMA, and Leader Development Work Group Committee Member (1998). Interview by author, 20 November 1998, West Point, New York.
- Military Intersession 1997 and the Military Arts and Sciences Field of Study Briefing, given to the Superintendent on 19 November 1996. Office of Institutional Research, United States Military Academy, West Point, New York.
- Palmer, David R., LTG. "Oral History Interview." Interview by Dr. Stephen B. Groves, (West Point, New York, 13, 17, & 24 June and 3 July 1991). Office of the USMA Historian, West Point, New York.
- Toffler, Patrick, COL (Retired), Office of Institutional Research. Interview by author, 12 October 1998, West Point, New York.
- United States Military Academy, Curriculum Committee. *Proposed 40 Course Baseline Curriculum Report to the Dean of the Academic Board*. West Point, New York, 19 May 1989.
- United States Military Academy, Department of Military Instruction, Military Science 402 Course Group. *The MS402 Course Material Company Commander Handbook (Draft)*. West Point, New York, November 1998.
- United States Military Academy, Leader Development Work Group, Balance Coordination, and Integration (BCI) subgroup. *Military Intersession Effectiveness (Draft)*. West Point, New York, 1998.
- United States Military Academy, Leader Development Work Group, Balance Coordination, and Integration (BCI) subgroup. *Military Intersession Effectiveness (Revised)*. West Point, New York, 1998.
- United States Military Academy, Middle States Accreditation Steering Committee. *Interim Report of the Middle States Accreditation Steering Committee, Volumes I, II, III*. USMA Archives, 20 DEC 1988.

- United States Military Academy, Office of Institutional Research. *First Class Survey, 1998*. West Point, New York, October 1998.
- United States Military Academy, Office of Institutional Research. *Military Intersession File*. West Point, New York, 1990-1998.
- United States Military Academy, Office of Institutional Research. *Project Enrichment: Alternative Model*. West Point, New York, 5 May 1989.
- United States Military Academy. *Preparing for West Point's Third Century: A Summary of the Years of Affirmation and Change, 1986-1991*. West Point, New York, June 1991.
- United States Military Academy. *Proceedings of the Academic Board-USMA, NO. 105, JUNE-DEC 1989*. USMA Archives, West Point, New York, 1990.
- United States Military Academy, Science Research Lab. *Project Proteus: Early Career Preparation, Experiences, and Commitment of Female and Male West Point Graduates*. USMA Archives, West Point, New York.
- United States Military Academy. *The Superintendent's Annual Historical Review 1984*. USMA Archives, West Point, New York.
- United States Military Academy. *The Superintendent's Annual Historical Review 1987*. USMA Archives, West Point, New York.
- United States Military Academy. *The Superintendent's Annual Historical Review 1988*. USMA Archives, West Point, New York.
- United States Military Academy. *The Superintendent's Annual Historical Review 1989*. USMA Archives, West Point, New York.
- United States Military Academy. *Training Operations Files, 1984*. USMA Archives, West Point, New York.
- United States Military Academy. *Training Operations Files, 1985*. USMA Archives, West Point, New York.
- United States Military Academy. *Training Operations Files, 1986*. USMA Archives, West Point, New York.
- United States Military Academy. *Training Operations Files, 1987*. USMA Archives, West Point, New York.
- United States Military Academy. *Training Operations Files, 1988*. USMA Archives, West Point, New York.

United States Military Academy. *Training Operations Files, 1989*. USMA Archives,  
West Point, New York.

Secondary Sources

Kelley, Thomas, MAJ, Department of Military Instruction. Interview by author, 27  
October 1998, West Point, New York, 10996.

Lovell, John P. *Neither Athens nor Sparta? The American Service Academies in  
Transition*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1979.