

Gerras brings critical thinking skills to elective

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Dr. Steve Gerras discusses concepts from 'How the Army Runs' with student Col. Lester Moore. Gerras is teaching the "Critical Thinking" elective this academic year.

The USAWC resident year opens with the two-week Strategic Thinking course, introducing key skills and strategies in understanding problems as a precursor to decision-making. A foundation in thinking skills needed by senior leaders throughout the academic year and into future assignments, the course includes critical thinking, creative thinking, systems thinking, thinking in time, among others.

For some, the critical thinking course whets appetites for more depth – and Dr. Steve Gerras' elective, Critical Thinking, is a deep dive into understanding and applying the critical thinking model.

"I built the course to remedy the miserable command and staff meetings I've been in," said Gerras, who earned his doctorate at Penn State University. A retired Army officer, he refers to the inspiration of myriad meetings in which he'd hear a dozen or so logical fallacies.

"I was brought here as the strategic leadership guy. I'd been the organizational management course director at West Point," said Gerras. When he was asked to teach critical thinking, he shaped the core lesson and built the elective from scratch. "They let me do what I've been passionate about since graduate school: to teach people how to think better," he said.

The Critical Thinking elective is a deep dive into the model of critical thinking we introduced in the

first two weeks of the core course, in August, as a foundation for the academic year. Half of the elective is deep on content and other half on application – with self-awareness exercises to help students recognize their own biases.

The elective is limited to 12 students to create an intimate environment. The class will include at least two International Fellows because we seek different perspectives. They need to have discussions that help identify how they think. Students effectively select their own case study by selecting a published article or op-ed to analyze. They share it with the seminar and then lead a discussion, applying critical thinking skills so as to reinforce what we've learned and understand more deeply for future application.

“I know I'm successful when students come to see me and say, ‘Steve, I hate you – I can no longer listen to network news without hearing the logical fallacies.’ I reply that I hope they'll apply it in the future.”

“Most of our students end up in places where they make a difference,” said Gerras.

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