

New academic prep course designed to help IFs transition to USAWC

Thomas Zimmerman, Army War College

New academic prep course designed to help IFs gain the most from USAWC experience



Instructor Julie Lankford talks with International Fellows of the USAWC Class of 2013 during a session of the new International Fellows Academic Prep course. photo by Thomas Zimmerman.

May 1, 2012 -- A new initiative by the Army War College International Fellows Program aims to help select Fellows of the Class of 2013 hit the ground running when they begin their studies later this year.

“From what I’ve seen, a lot of the Fellows arrive here with communicative English but are surprised by the level and pace of discussion within seminar and have a hard time meeting the academic writing standards,” said **Jeremy Beussink**, writing and research instructor and director of a new International Fellows Academic Prep course. “Most learn and adapt fairly quickly, but my opinion is that if they start core courses in August having already accomplished the preparation and adaption to college level academia and interaction, then their year here will be much more rewarding for them and their US counterparts.”

To that end, Jeremy has designed the course to prepare 13 senior level international military students to become academically successful USAWC International Fellows.

“There’s some English teaching throughout the course, but the course is centered on preparation in all the skills necessary for a non-native English speaker to be successful in an Army War College seminar,” he said. “This means practice and learning in comprehension, group discussion, presentations, academic writing, research, and documentation.”

Col. John Burbank, IF program director, said it's important for the Fellows to be able to focus on these skills before the core USAWC program begins.

"This really is an immersion course," he said. "We wanted to hold this under conditions where the Fellows can focus on it, without the distractions of moving to a new country, family concerns and the workload of the USAWC curriculum." The course will run until mid-June, when the normal IF orientation program begins.

The nine-week course is made up of different modules and touches on topics like Presentations and Group Discussion, Research, Documentation, and Plagiarism; Writing Structure and Building Essays and preparing them for the "TOEFL" (Test of English as a Foreign Language) test, which is necessary for the students to receive a master's degree upon completion of the USAWC program. Instructors Julie Lankford and Travis Robinson assist in teaching sections of the course.

"The structure of the course is similar to the seminar setting—meaning learning is based more on discussion and interaction rather than lecture," said Beussink. "There is lecture included at times, along with group work, various skills exercises, and other small group teaching/learning methodologies. The idea is to be able to teach every student, to help each individual learn, while interacting in a group, rather than simply providing information to a body of students."

Burbank said he hoped the course helped set the Fellows up for success.

"My hat goes off to all of the Fellows who are selected to attend the Army War College," said Burbank. "It's an extremely challenging, graduate level course that is demanding for even the best U.S. officers. Add in the language, cultural and other challenges and the Fellows have quite a task ahead of them. We want to do what we can to put them in a position to be successful."