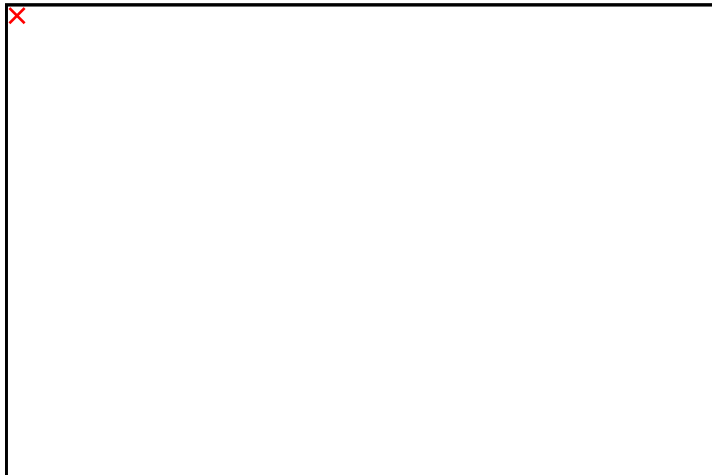


New elective sheds light on Afghanistan

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New elective sheds light on issues, challenges in Afghanistan



Dr. Larry Goodson leads a discussion during a class of the "Understanding Afghanistan and its region," elective in Wil Waschoe Auditorium Dec. 15. Photo by Thomas Zimmerman.

Dec. 16, 2009 – Army War College students will now be able to take a deeper look at the issues and challenges facing operations and reconstruction in Afghanistan thanks to a new regional studies elective.

The course, "Understanding Afghanistan and its region," began on Dec. 3 with a session in Bliss Hall. The goal of the elective is two-fold. One is to prepare students for future assignments in Afghanistan and the other is to support the operational force with strategic levels challenges according to Dr. Larry Goodson, course instructor.

The class is structured in two parts, one a large

group lecture followed by separate seminar discussions. A four-person faculty team made up of Goodson, Col. Jim Boling, Dr. Sherwood McGinnis and Prof. Richard Smyth lead the discussions.

A unique learning experience for the students is writing their papers in response to strategic questions posed by the Operations branch of the Pakistan-Afghanistan Coordination Cell instead of a single academic topic.

"We received a list of questions that we have paired the students by experience to answer," said Dr. Jim Helis, DNSS director. "This will challenge them and give them experience in answering a real-world question in a policy paper at the national strategic level."

Helis went on to state that each of the course instructors brings a very recent operational and strategic experience in Afghanistan to the table and brings their own unique experience to the course. Smyth, Boling and McGinnis all recently returned from the region in the last six months and Goodson is considered a world-wide expert on Afghanistan.

For example, Smyth is a career foreign services officer, has spent nine years total in Afghanistan and brings familiarity to the issues facing the region to the table.

"After 30 years of war, Afghanistan is due for a break," he said. "You can feel the gratitude for the U.S. actions and support by the vast majority of the Afghan people."

The class includes an introduction to modern Afghanistan, a history of the nation, a review of social structure, economics, and other key issues facing the region.

"The goal is that the course creates a deeper understanding of the complex social, political and tribal organization of Afghanistan," said Helis. "We realized that there is an increased likelihood that our students will either directly or indirectly deal with these issues in the near future and wanted to help prepare them."

