

Through partnerships - Nominative Leadership Course expands conventional thought

By Robert Martin, USAWC PAO 15 March 2021



The Nominative Leadership Course, like all other courses, had to find ways to lead through dramatic challenges in educating senior leaders; teaching in the Covid-19 environment has become a mix of in-class education and lessons done remotely on a variety of digital platforms.

The NLC scheduled to begin March 21 kicks off with a virtual presentation from Sergeant Major of the Army Michael Grinston at the Army War College's Letort View Community Center. Since being established in 2015, the course continually evolves to help prepare and guide those senior NCOs to transition from tactical operations to strategic level positions. The course was developed at the Army War College because of its focus on strategic level skills and knowledge.

USAWC Command Sergeant Major Brian Flom, in particular, has been tasked to lead the NLC through the dramatic challenges of educating senior leaders by the SM of the Army.

“Teaming up with course director Erik Anderson we went back to look how

we could deliver NLC virtually, similarly to what's going on here," said Flom about the resident Army War College classes.

"What is it that we want the students to take away from the nominative leaders' course in a limited number of hours?" he asked. "[Students] don't have that same attention span when they are in person. I can run face-to-face classes for eight or nine hours. But, if I have you online, I get five or six hours out of you before you're no longer benefiting from the course."

"But what's been great is I've still been able to bring in outside presenters such as Dr. Longnecker from the University of Toledo. It's been a concerted effort to engage the students, so they're not receiving just information briefs but having a great dialogue," said Flom.

"If you look back at the non-commissioned officer professional development system starting from your basic leader's course on up to the sergeant's major course, their instruction teaches conformity, teaches doctrine; it is programmed. What we want to do with the nominative leaders course is - we want to stretch their thought. We want them to exercise critical thinking in an exercise scenario."

"The Sergeant Major of the Army challenged me with what he wants to see in NLC. He wants mindfulness. So, we introduced mindfulness to the students through a partnership with Dr. Amishi Jha from the University of Miami."

"Then there was data analytics, so if I can present your data, 'what's the so what?'" asked Flom. "It's got to be more than the numbers. What are you, as a nominative Sargent Major going to do with that information? How is that going to benefit the readiness and impact your organization?"

Leading organizational change was the last request, he said.

"If you look at 2020, it's no secret that we've had no shortage of change in the Army; everything's on the table now. So how do we take that programmatic change or policy change that comes from the Army level? Now how do we echelon that challenge, and then how do you do that in a virtual environment or a geographically dispersed environment?"

"Partnering with other universities will provide that executive-level education to further stretch and shake up their thoughts and have them look at things a bit differently. To take that executive-level leadership, that strategic level leadership, and apply that to your organization," Flom said.

For the next two weeks, 12 active duty, 5 Army National Guard and 3 Army Reserve Senior Sergeants Majors who are in or heading to serve on 1- and 2-star commands will be immersed in course work that addresses topics and issues they will encounter, e.g., national security, Army policy, economics, defense budget, and Congressional interactions.

Key contributors to the two-week Nomination Leader Course for nominative (Command) Sergeants Major include --

- Dr. Clint Longnecker, University of Toledo: Senior Leader Ethical Behavior
- Dr. Amishi Jha, University of Miami: Mindfulness
- Dr. Raghuram Lyengar, Wharton School: Data analysis
- Dr. Nancy Rothbard, Wharton School: Leading Change at the Strategic Level
- Josh Rosenthal, TalentSmart: Emotional Intelligence
- Dr. Ethan Molick, Wharton School: Fostering Innovation
- Dr. Todd Henshaw & Dr. Mike Useem, Wharton School: Strategic Environment
- Rosenthal, TalentSmart: Emotional Intelligence
- Dr. Kathy Pearson, Wharton School: Strategic Thinking
- Dr. Peter Cappelli, Wharton School: Enterprise Level Talent Management