

Applied Communications Lab enables faculty to enable students

By Elena Patton, Public Affairs Office 26 February 2021



Prof. Leigh Caraher, director of the ACL Lab; Dr. Abigail Stonerock, professor of Executive Communication; Dr. Larry Miller, professor of Communicative Arts, Dr. Abram Trosky, professor of Communicative Arts; Ann Sipos, writing coach and instructor.

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The Army War College has a unique approach to Strategic Intelligence; it focuses on how to improve the consumption of intelligence to support decision-making and leadership. The recent Strategic Intelligence Skills Day introduced tools to enable students to become more adept consumers of strategic intelligence.

Dr. Genevieve Lester, the De Serio Chair of Strategic Intelligence, partnered with the Applied Communication and Learning Lab to guide students in better use of intelligence for improved decision-making. The skills range from critical thinking to improved teamwork and communication.

Lester engaged two experts to discuss the range of skills needed -- retired LTG Karen Gibson, whose last post was in the Office of the Director of National Intelligence after a long career in military intelligence, and Mr. Neil Wiley, who recently retired from his position as Principal Executive in the Office of the DNI. They provided insights that students applied immediately in an exercise that demanded that they recognize intelligence requirements for a hypothetical bilateral negotiation with North Korea.

This year, the ACL Lab is collaborating with faculty to sponsor eight unique Executive Skills Days, featuring a range of senior leaders and academic experts to help them recognize, develop and apply executive skills needed at the strategic leadership level. The Lab sponsors these Skills Days and includes presentations:

- building teams at the strategic level
- uncertainty and decision-making, and
- strategic forecasting.

In September, retired Gen. Joseph Votel spoke to war college students about the importance of executive communication. The former commander of U.S. Central Command, and a 2001 USAWC graduate, discussed the role of communication in shaping and informing decision-making at the strategic level.

In December, Dr. Steven Stoddard, Director of the Center for Army Analysis, virtually engaged with U.S. Army War College students about how the Army uses data and analysis to inform decisions. The students then completed seminar-based exercises in applied data analysis in Army recruiting.

The purpose of the Applied Communications Lab is to incorporate new, experiential ideas, practices, and methodologies centered on executive communication into the curriculum, and to determine the most successful approaches, explained Dr. James Breckenridge, U.S. Army War College Provost.

The ACL reflects the Army War College's innovative approach to preparing students for the sophisticated communication—the executive communication—they will engage in as senior leaders at the forefront of change. In the Army War College and the national security context, executive communication is about transforming complex issues into information that senior leaders and decision-makers can convey and use, according to Prof. Leigh Caraher, director of the ACL Lab.

The ACL Lab recognizes that students need academic writing skills as well as the executive communication skills for their follow-on assignments. "Rather than seeing communication as an additive to the curriculum, we want to look at how do we infuse opportunities to both learn and practice effective communication skills," said Caraher.

By working with and through the faculty, the Lab can have the broadest reach and most significant impact.

"Our focus is our students, but the faculty is our center of gravity," said Caraher.

The Lab provides resources and workshops for faculty to give helpful feedback on written assignments, facilitate seminar dialogue, and guide students in pre-writing tasks.

"Teaching Problems Tuesdays" is a series offering methodologies and best practices for faculty members to incorporate into curriculum design. For these presentations intended to help faculty help students enhance communication skills, Caraher works with Dr. Abigale Stonerock, a professor of executive communication.

The Lab aims to benefit all students—resident and distance education, NLC, ASEP and BSEP students.

Working with students directly, the Lab offers consultations, writing support, and diagnostic assessments, as needed.

For student's Strategic Research Projects, the Lab compiled and print resources to help students learn to -- develop a research question; collect and evaluate sources; and analyze evidence.

Caraher has the experience and the credibility communicating in the environments our students enter upon graduating. Her educational background in international security parallels the war college curriculum. She understands the language senior leaders must use in communicating with decision-makers. During her career, she worked in the Executive and Legislative branches and multiple U.S. government agencies, giving her a broad national security perspective. She has served as an advisor in 2, 3, and 4-star commands.

Caraher's ACL team includes Dr. Larry Miller, professor of Communicative Arts; Dr. Abram Trosky, professor of Communicative Arts; Dr. Abigail Stonerock, professor of Executive Communication; and Ann Sipos, assistant Professor of English.