

USAWC professor recognized for refining a critical part of the tailored education experience

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Dr. Brett Weigle, USAWC professor, recognized for his work on transforming Oral Comps from a course-specific evaluation to a more comprehensive assessment.

Oral comprehensive exams highlight the student experience at the Army War College. Oral Comps test students' abilities to address complex issues and questions that require them to connect knowledge and themes across the entire curriculum. They receive personalized feedback about their ability to synthesize complex topics.

"... [I]t lets the students walk out of here with a better appreciation for what they learned," said Dr. Brett Weigle, whose work earned selection for the War College Excellence in Service Award.

As designed and refined by Dr. Brett Weigle, Oral Comps are a critical part

of the Army War College tailored education experience. Professor of Theater and Campaign Planning, Weigle has served as chair of the Oral Comprehensive Exams Committee since 2018. Recently, he was honored for his service in leading the committee work to change the oral exams from a course-specific evaluation to a more comprehensive assessment of the concepts the students learned and applied throughout the year.

Students meet with a three-member faculty seminar team to address five questions with in-depth answers. Then, they handle the team's follow-up questions to demonstrate the breadth of knowledge gained throughout their coursework. In turn, students receive detailed feedback on their integration of course concepts and delivery of their responses.

"It lets students tie the thinking frameworks they have learned all year in the different courses together in a way that develops them into the strategic thinkers the commandant has promised the Army and the Joint Force," said Weigle.

Since 2020, oral comps have been transformed, thanks to the work of Weigle, Dr. Tom Galvin, Tim Brown, and Dr. Celestino Perez, a representative from each department. To better assess the students and the institution, the committee recast the traditional course-level questions and expanded them up and out to encompass the curriculum-wide outcomes. Once the questions are drafted, the committee receives departmental feedback from the faculty to produce the best questions to gauge learning objectives outcomes.

During the pandemic, Weigle's committee worked through the policies and mechanisms to change the delivery of oral comps from a physical to a remote setting, instead of defaulting to a written exam. He created virtual briefings for faculty and students to watch, explaining the purpose and mechanics of oral comps and providing preparation guidance that included a practice question.

Oral comps require students to exercise oral communication skills, giving them practice in forming a narrative, telling the story, persuading senior leaders based on clear evidence, and clear communication explained Weigle. This is a crucial aspect to developing well-rounded strategic advisers and leaders to help the Defense enterprise address its most significant problems.

Each seminar team evaluates 15-16 students' oral comps who are not from their seminar. "It is nice to see the fruition of eight months' worth of work," said Weigle.

A 2007 USAWC grad, Weigle returned to the War College as the Director of Second-Year Studies in the Department of Distance Education, where he started their electives program, 2009-2014. Currently, he teaches Military Strategy and Campaigning for the resident program and an elective "Energy and National Security" offered simultaneously to War College distance and resident program students.

In the core curriculum, he teaches Military Strategy and Campaigning for which he received the Excellence in Teaching Award. These award nominations are based on department leadership observations, input from peers and student feedback on student surveys.

A retired Army colonel, Weigle's military experience includes many overseas tours in Bahrain, Germany, Turkey, Spain, and twice in Korea. He was posted with U.S. Forces Korea and to two NATO assignments.

Weigle earned his B.S. in Chemical Engineering from the University of Idaho, his M.S. in Petroleum Engineering from Penn State, and his doctorate in Higher Education Administration from George Washington University.