

Title: Faculty at a Uniformed Services Academy Discuss Sharing, Collaboration, and Improvisation

Abstract:

This three-member panel includes military and non-military faculty from a U.S. military academy who worked together to ensure faculty development, consistency in curriculum, and student engagement in experiential learning activities across six sections of Organizational Behavior and Leadership. Our discussion will highlight the benefits of knowledge sharing, peer-to-peer mentoring, and the inclusion of diverse perspectives as experienced by the panel, which includes an active-duty instructor, a former active-duty and current institute director, and a civilian lecturer. We hope to engage those interested in understanding collaborative faculty behaviors that may improve teaching, curriculum development, and faculty learning.

Keywords: Collaborative Teaching, Faculty Mentorship, Experiential Learning

The present panel represents a military academy where the undergraduate education serves the purpose of preparing future officers for a division of the uniformed services. To fulfill its purpose, students at the academy – heretofore referred to as cadets – are required to take an Organizational Behavior and Leadership course, which is a core course that supports the academy’s mission of producing future leaders. Enrollment for the course is therefore high, and so it has been divided into six different sections that are currently being taught by military as well as civilian faculty members. The course itself uses an academy leadership model that serves as a framework to develop the leadership skills of individual cadets, who are required to examine the relationships between individual behavior, group behaviors, and organizational effectiveness. Particular attention is paid to the practical leadership implications of current theory, given that graduates will immediately assume roles as junior officers upon leaving the academy. Teaching methods we use include case studies, classroom exercises, lectures, discussions, and use of the academy’s simulator to re-create an actual crisis. The use of military simulations is critical to preparing cadets for crisis situations and is similar in purpose to the Antietam Battlefield exercise used at the Uniformed Services University, where the focus is to provide medical leadership support to defense organizations, including the Armed Forces (O’Connor et. al, 2015). Ours is a dynamic teaching environment with an emphasis on experiential learning, consistency in curriculum, and content delivery that must be aligned with the mission of the academy and the uniformed service to which it is related. We would like to engage with individuals who can add insights on teaching innovations, curriculum development, faculty development, and experiential learning to assist with our own development in these areas.

The core of the military academy’s leadership program is an adaptation based on Kolb’s Cycle of Experiential Learning theory (Kolb, 1984 as cited in Zapalska et. al, 2016). It serves the school’s unique purpose of developing the self-awareness and individual leadership skills of cadets, while developing a shared value system across these future officers as a whole. Upon graduation from the academy, cadets immediately proceed into their first positions as active-duty junior officers in potentially hazardous environments. As such, the notion of a shared value system is of critical importance to the academy in upholding the mission of the uniformed service that it serves, given that errors in judgment have been known to result in lost lives. In

Zapalska et. al's (2016) description of undergraduate student development in a uniformed services program that borrows experiential learning methods from Kolb's theory, the authors discuss the variability in instructional form and student development activities that were experienced while using this methodology. We recognized the potential for variability in using this methodology and, given the need to uphold the integrity of the program, sought to create consistency in the delivery of instruction, content, and classroom activities. Given that we had six different sections of Organizational Behavior and Leadership taught by 3 military instructors and 2 civilian lecturers, we realized early in the Fall of 2022 that we needed to have a high level of faculty engagement.

One of the greatest challenges that we faced was in bridging the gap between the knowledge base(s) between our professional military instructors and our non-military, or civilian, lecturers. Two out of three of our military instructors are currently active duty and one is retired, but all share the experience of having attended the academy as undergraduates before assuming their professional roles. As such, they are aware of the ins-and-outs of academy life, know its protocols, and can identify with the experiences of the cadets themselves. Furthermore, they have served as officers in the uniformed services division to which our cadets are dedicated to serve and share in a special allegiance that is not easily captured in words. Of the two lecturers who teach Organizational Behavior and Leadership sections, one is retired from an active-duty military role and the other is a former owner of multiple convenience stores and gas stations. Both lecturers possess terminal degrees and teaching experience in higher-education, non-military environments. The diversity of experience across faculty was, and remains, multifaceted and requires a two-way exchange to facilitate communications to address various needs and skills gaps. While civilian academics transitioning into teaching environments focused on developing the leadership skills of future military officers may pose obvious challenges, it would be wrong to assume that active-duty members do not confront a learning curve when given assignments that transition them into academic roles. Smith (2013) helps to shed light on this reality in a work that focuses on intelligence studies in the U.S. and the qualifications that one must possess to teach in this subject area. Not surprisingly, while the majority of individuals who teach intelligence studies have applied experience in the area (i.e., non-

civilian backgrounds), they lack, by and large, terminal degrees. Clearly, approaches to knowledge acquisition exist in uniformed-services environments that do not exist in non-military environments. However, from our own experience, it seems that while civilian faculty may need to learn about military learning and environments, it could also be true that military faculty need to learn about academic learning and environments.

From the outset, we found ourselves engaged in a complex learning environment in which knowledge had to be shared between military and civilian faculty and consistently applied across all sections of Organizational Behavior and Leadership in a consistent manner. Yet, as unique as our situation once appeared to us, we have since discovered that we are not alone. In Swaim's (2017) research conducted at the U.S. Air Force Academy, the author uses cognitive apprenticeship theory (Collins, et. al, 1989) as a basis to explore the orientation and assimilation of new faculty members into a uniformed services environment like our own. Some of our practices are similar to – if not the same – as practices used by participants in the previous study, despite our not having approached Fall of 2022 with any intention of creating a research project or finding a new theoretical framework for Organizational Behavior and Leadership. As for Swaim's experience, the author observed more seasoned faculty members advising newer faculty by using language such as 'here's what I do; here's why' (p. 2253), in what cognitive theory suggests is modeling behavior. Our own faculty regularly exchanged – and continue to exchange – ideas with each other through Microsoft Teams, chats, and emails, and, because our office doors are typically left open, by walking into other faculty members' offices. Faculty members also shared course materials in the U.S.A.F.A. example, as we do in our own meetings. For our purposes, we find that having one common syllabus for all sections of Organizational Behavior and Leadership serves as a guide and schedule that ensures content being taught across all six sections remains consistent. Supported by the exchange of slides, in-class activities, and bi-weekly meetings to discuss how we are going to proceed in the classroom in the immediate weeks to come, our own work bears semblance to what Swaim describes as scaffolding. In general, our experience includes an exchange of ideas and interactions between non-military and civilian faculty that fit well with Swaim's description of mentoring, which encompasses the three areas of scaffolding, coaching, and modeling. It is not only of interest to us that our practices seem to have

found a familiar home with regard to the previously mentioned work, but in the author's recommendation for further research into understanding how faculty can effectively assimilate into unique educational environments such as those of a military academy.

Another component of the panel's discussion will relate to faculty learning largely because of cooperative engagement between faculty members towards improving Organizational Behavior and Leadership curriculum. As a result of faculty working cooperatively – each of us experts within our own subject areas – we were, and are, able to learn and develop professionally on an individual basis. The idea of learning by sharing, we agree, caught us by surprise, as the learning environment seems to have flipped, turning us – the instructors – into the very students we seek to teach. When shown in the light of Collins et. al's (1991, p. 13) statement that well-designed teaching methods should 'give students the opportunity to observe, engage in, and invent or discover expert strategies in context', we have assumed dual roles, including that of student, while working to achieve better teaching practices within a unique context. Yet, if this statement applies to our context, surely it must apply to others – as evidenced by the works cited in the present submission, which seem so in tune with the experiences we share. Thus, while this panel seeks to discuss its own experiences with curriculum development, innovation, and faculty engagement, we also recognize that other professionals have similar experiences within their own unique contexts that may help to enrich our practices going forward.

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