

SOCIOLOGY FOR A COMPREHENSIVE PME CURRICULUM

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Sociology and the Military

The social paradigm shifts in the 21st century have impacted every institution from the family to the military. Today, it is an operational reality that the social and political climate in a contemporary operational environment (COE) plays a vital role in the military decision-making process (MDMP). Consequently, it is important that leaders understand how the fundamentals of sociological concepts such as social networks and sociological imagination can be an advantage in the decision-making process in future combat operations. Similar to understanding the historical and legal implications in decision making, sociological concepts add another perspective when making decisions in full spectrum operations that are characteristic of highly complex and challenging situations.

Sociology involves the investigation of the roots, structure, customs, habits, objectives, and activities of society. As such, the military, as an important aspect of American society, is subject to a sociological understanding. Based on the creative insights and collaborative efforts of scholars during its formative years, military sociology was recognized as a subfield of sociology in the mid-1950s. Although there is a large body of literature on military sociology, the study of sociology is practically non-existent in U.S. Army schools and training centers. In particular, military sociology as a core subject is not included in U.S. Army professional military education (PME) programs.¹ Take for example the Command and General Staff Officers Course (CGSOC) curriculum.² Although CGSOC does contain courses in humanities and social science (to include military history, military leadership, military law, and military ethics), the subject of sociology is only mentioned in passing as a footnote. The courses mentioned above are embedded in the CGSOC curriculum to stimulate student thinking and to develop a deeper understanding and appreciation of the cause and effects of social phenomena in the context of military affairs. The inclusion of a military sociology curriculum is intended to enhance and broaden the leader's knowledge and world views particularly within the context of high intensity and rapidly changing military scenarios.

Incorporating the fundamental principles of sociology into leadership development improves a student's capacity to become more open-minded, critical, reflective, and receptive to critical-thinking processes essential in the development of the competencies for better decision making. By possessing a fundamental knowledge of sociological concepts, leaders will be able to make critical assessments and decisions associated with the present operating environment. The expectation is that the study of sociology will contribute to the development of critical-thinking and problem-solving skills that will prove useful in real-life decision-making situations.

The most promising aspects of sociology are seen in the application of the sociological imagination in MDMP and the use of social network analysis (SNA) in military operations. The expectation is that leaders will be equipped with the critical-thinking tools needed to perform their duties in a successful manner. The application of sociological theories and concepts are analogous to using a camera with a wide-angle viewfinder that opens a narrow field of vision to a much broader landscape. In a 2001 *Military Review* article, MAJ Scott Efflandt and MAJ Brian Reed argue that the value of sociology in officer education is immeasurable for the professional development of potential leaders.³

By adding the sociological paradigm to the decision-making toolbox, decisions made within the context of historical events and ethical considerations will be more meaningful, sophisticated, and precise. Ultimately, relying on sociological perspectives will serve leaders well when called upon to make decisions ranging from routine choices to complex strategic decisions.

Military Sociology

Sociology awakens our consciousness to understand how social structures can influence the events that impact on the lives of individual members of society. Until about 30 years ago, the military was relatively immune to external social influences, but the end of the Cold War era changed how we think about the realities in the COE.⁴ Most



International students at the Western Hemisphere Institute of Security Cooperation at Fort Benning, GA, discuss an assignment with an instructor. (Photo by Milton F. Mariani Rodriguez)

notably, recent social movements and political events worldwide have impacted the military as an institution that once was considered impenetrable by external influences. Consequently, time-honored traditions and values that for centuries were considered the hallmark of military culture have undergone fundamental change.

The social problems and issues that have affected the internal dynamics of the military have increased significantly over the past 30 years and can be grouped into two categories. The first group of issues can be classified as micro-social and reflect changing social and ethical attitudes by American society, with the result that we now see new policies and reform toward society's attitude concerning women in combat, drug abuse, minorities, sexual harassment, tattoos, toxic leadership, and sexual orientation.

The second category of social changes emanates from the macro-social level, also referred to as the global society. The most pressing concerns, which have profound implications for changes to military culture, are advanced engineering, weapon technology, sophisticated communications systems, instantaneous acquisition of information, economic instability, border disputes, drug trafficking, rogue governments, and the spread of international terrorism.

The two distinct categories of sociological issues provide the impetus for the conceptual framework for a model military sociology program designed for PME. Within this framework, the program has four academic components: introductory, intermediate, advanced, and capstone. The proposed curriculum consists of subject-specific courses that are integrated in the framework of an interdisciplinary curriculum. First, the instruction of sociology courses is synchronized with common core learning objectives such as critical thinking and decision making. Secondly, the military sociology curriculum is interwoven with the courses on military history, leadership, and ethics. For example, an integrated and interdisciplinary design provides a balanced approach for teaching social science courses alongside the core curriculum of PME-designated courses such as CGSOC. Collectively, the quartet of the interdisciplinary themes of history, ethics, leadership, and sociology forms the social science foundation that will prepare leaders for assignments with friendly forces in the joint operational arena.

Application of Sociological Concepts

In keeping with PME education goals, the model curriculum provides students with a sociological overview and two key sociological concepts that possess tremendous potential for military application: the sociological imagination and SNA.

The sociological imagination can be used as a thinking tool for understanding and resolving problems and issues that are central to the military profession.⁵ The concept of sociological imagination was introduced by C. Wright Mills and is intended to lift us outside the immediate boundaries of our personal world so that we can have a broader appreciation of reality.⁶ The most significant advantage for using sociological imagination is that it helps leaders analyze the impact of local events with a global-social perspective.⁷ Consequently, when a leader uses sociological imagination, his decisions are based on a broader set of perspectives that the leader can use to explore contemporary social issues through the use of case studies, personal experiences, and interaction between students.

With its focus on relational networks, SNA has been used by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to identify terrorist networks and by the U.S. Army to neutralize enemy cells that have been formed to manufacture improvised explosive devices (IEDs).⁸

Most notably, SNA was used in the capture of Saddam Hussein in 2003 by U.S. forces during Operation Red Dawn. In his 2006 doctoral dissertation, Brian Joseph Reed attributed the success of this historic mission to pinpointing the structural and relational characteristics of Saddam Hussein's social network, a clear use of SNA.⁹

Reed wrote, "Network concepts allowed me to highlight the structure of the previously unobserved associations by focusing on the pre-existing relationships and ties that bind together such a group."¹⁰

The aim of the SNA module is to introduce the basic principles of SNA as a sociological process that can be used to analyze empirical relational data gathered on social entities and organizational functions and to chart these relationships.¹¹ Students will be introduced to the graph theory, which is used to analyze and portray structural studies of the relationship between actors and structural properties within a network to facilitate the decision-making process.

SNA is intended to focus primarily on the theoretical aspects of this sociological tool by studying and analyzing case studies that illustrate the use of SNA in military-related operations.¹² Case studies include contemporary literature on the capture of Saddam Hussein and the identification of terrorist networks and cells in the U.S. by Homeland Security. The case studies will aid in understanding how the dynamics of SNA can be applied to a variety of issues in military operations. SNA classes will be synchronized with common core subjects such as critical thinking and decision making in leadership.

Model Military Sociology Curriculum

Overview: This program introduces students to the relationship between society and the armed forces as a social institution. To gain a full appreciation of military sociology, the curriculum is comprised of five modules. These include the historical evolution of the relationship between society and the military that witnessed transformation with the end of the Cold War; the effects of globalization; the transformation of the military, the role of the military in the 21st century, and the changing cultural values within the military; and the new vision for training military leaders.¹³ The modules are designed to introduce the student to sociological theories, concepts, and methods in preparation for military assignments worldwide in the 21st century. The overarching goal of this program of study is the application of sociological perspectives and tools in the development of the competencies that are required by leaders to be successful in future combat operations.¹⁴

The components of the model sociology program are designed in a progressive fashion to support the Army's leader development goals. Each component represents an independent tier with a set of clearly distinguishable goals and terminal learning objectives. This approach allows for an integrated and interdisciplinary curriculum that emphasizes a holistic approach to the development of the core leadership competencies. The model sociology program is structured in a tier fashion to take students from the introductory level that includes fundamental concepts and theories to the advanced level, where students have the opportunity to learn and apply sociological perspectives to military applications.

Sociology Curriculum Strategies for CGSOC

The model military sociology curriculum is designed for integration and synchronization with the learning objectives of PME leader courses. For example, the sociology model can be integrated to run concurrently with the CGSOC Common Core Course. The introduction of sociology courses will allow for a holistic approach that incorporates social science perspectives into the overall learning process as it relates to MDMP.¹⁵ The decisions that students make become more meaningful and relevant when based on historical, ethical, and sociological perspectives.

Curriculum	Component (24 Hours)	Module	Sociology Course
Military Sociology	Introductory (6 Hours)	Intro Sociology	S1: Understanding Sociology S2: Social and Cultural Themes S3: Social Change in the Global Community
	Intermediate (6 Hours)	Military Sociology	S4: History of Military Sociology S5: Contemporary Military Issues S6: Military Application of Sociological Concepts
	Advanced (8 Hours)	Sociological Imagination	S7: Introduction to Sociological Imagination S8: Application of Sociological Imagination
		Social Network Analysis	S9: Introduction to Social Network Analysis S10: Application of Social Network Analysis
	Capstone (4 Hours)	Military Sociology	S11: Military Sociology Seminar

Figure 1 — Model Sociology Curriculum Components

Summary

It is difficult to imagine a time when the need to transform military education has been greater. The profound social changes that have emerged since the beginning of this millennium have been the impetus for an unprecedented paradigm shift across all institutions. The literature on military education is replete with why and how competency skills need reshaping to meet the demands of the changing military landscape.

In a 2010 *Army* magazine article, GEN Martin E. Dempsey noted the necessity to build the right Army. He said, “The Army’s conceptual framework provides the intellectual underpinnings necessary to make institutional and operational full spectrum operations for our Army and to integrate our efforts among doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership, personnel and facilities domains and warfighting functions.”¹⁶

The sociology curriculum is intended to prepare leaders to be self-aware and adaptive critical thinkers capable of making timely decisions that will challenge the leader in unprecedented ways. The design is in response to the transformation initiatives that the Department of the Army has established to meet the needs of 21st century leaders. Unlike the Cold War doctrine that was developed for fighting force-on-force, today’s Army doctrine embodies a variety of warfare missions that include emergency relief, peacekeeping, stability missions, and limited intervention.¹⁷ Moreover, social changes worldwide have affected how the Army will train and educate the members of the active and reserve force components.¹⁸ The overall Army mission is to equip leaders with the demonstrated mastery of the skills and core competencies necessary when confronted with leadership situations and critical decision-making scenarios.¹⁹ The model sociology curriculum is responsive to this mission and is intended to support the goals to prepare U.S. Army leaders for worldwide assignments in the 21st century.

Notes

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² CGSC Circular 350-1, *U.S. Army Command and General Staff College Catalog* (January 2016). Retrieved from <http://usacac.army.mil/CAC2/cgsc/repository/350-1.pdf>.

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- ⁴ Morris Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier: A Social and Political Portrait* (NY: The Free Press, 1971).
- ⁵ Anthony Dekker, "Social Network Analysis in Military Headquarters Using CAVALIER," Proceedings of 5th International Command and Control Research and Technology Symposium, Australian War Memorial, Canberra ACT, Australia. Retrieved from http://www.dodccrp.org/events/5th_ICCRTS/papers/Track6/039.pdf
- ⁶ C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1959).
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- ⁹ Brian Joseph Reed, "Formalizing the Informal: A Network Analysis of an Insurgency (Doctoral dissertation, University of Maryland, College Park, MD, 2006). Retrieved from <http://drum.lib.umd.edu/bitstream/1903/3759/1/umi-umd-3598.pdf>.
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- ¹² Dekker, "Social Network Analysis in Military Headquarters."
- ¹³ GEN Martin E. Dempsey, "Driving Change Through a Campaign of Learning, *Army* (October 2010): 65-70. Retrieved from http://cape.army.mil/repository/ProArms/Dempsey_1010.pdf.
- ¹⁴ Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 6-22, *Army Leadership*, (August 2012). Retrieved from http://www.benning.army.mil/mssp/PDF/adrp6_22_new.pdf.
- ¹⁵ Alice Y. Kolb and David A. Kolb, "Experiential Learning Theory: A Dynamic, Holistic Approach to Management Learning, Education and Development." Retrieved from <http://learningfromexperience.com/media/2010/08/ELT-Hbk-MLED-LFE-website-2-10-08.pdf>.
- ¹⁶ Dempsey, "Driving Change," 65-70.
- ¹⁷ U.S. Army Information Papers, "Full-Spectrum Operations in Army Capstone Doctrine." Retrieved from http://www.army.mil/aps/08/information_papers/transform/Full_Spectrum_Operations.html.
- ¹⁸ Field Manual (FM) 3-0, *Operations*, (June 2001).
- ¹⁹ ADRP 6-22.

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