



PUBLIC AFFAIRS

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
DEFENSE MEDIA ACTIVITY
DEFENSE INFORMATION SCHOOL
6500 MAPES ROAD
FORT MEADE, MD 20755-5620

Public Affairs & Communication Strategy Qualification Course Welcome Letter

Welcome to the Public Affairs & Communication Strategy Qualification Course (PACS-Q) at the Defense Information School, Fort Meade, Maryland.

Read and follow this welcome letter in detail as it contains information and actions that require student attention before, during, and after the course.

PRIOR TO ARRIVAL

Student communication with the Defense Information School prior to arrival always starts with the Registrar's Office (dma.meade.dinfos.list.registrar@mail.mil). Students may have Service specific or course related questions, and will be directed to the appropriate authority inside the school if the question cannot be answered by the Registrar.

Appropriate personal, financial and family planning helps ensure academic success. Expect to remain in the local Fort Meade area for the duration of the 3-month course. The course structure does not offer extended Leave/Pass breaks, although the school observes Federal Holidays and has a student travel Exception to Policy process. All actions within the Defense Travel System under the [Joint Travel Regulations](#) are each student's responsibility. See PAY below.

Ensure the following are completed by the report date.

- Read the pre-course PACS-Q materials attached to the "Welcome Email" from the Registrar's Office, which is sent 30 days prior to the course start date. See <https://www.dinfos.dma.mil/> in Course Catalogue/PACS-Q
- Prepare for any Service-specific requirements outlined below.
- Send Reasonable Accommodations to DINFOS 30 days prior to course start date. See REASONABLE ACCOMMODATIONS section below.
- Pack appropriate uniforms and attire. See UNIFORM AND CLOTHING REQUIREMENTS section below. Fort Meade has a Military Clothing and Sales.



DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
DEFENSE MEDIA ACTIVITY
DEFENSE INFORMATION SCHOOL
6500 MAPES ROAD
FORT MEADE, MD 20755-5620

PUBLIC AFFAIRS

- Check HEALTHCARE below. Follow the DINFOS website for information about COVID vaccinations. <https://www.dinfos.dma.mil/Coronavirus/>

REASONABLE ACCOMMODATIONS

The reasonable accommodation process begins when an employee, applicant, or their representative requests, due to a disability, an adjustment or modification that will enable the individual to perform the essential functions of the position. If a student requires reasonable accommodations, please inform the Registrar (dma.meade.dinfos.list.academic-records@mail.mil) **30 days prior to arrival** so the Registrar's Office can work with the DINFOS training department and logistics to provide needed resources on Training Day 1.

ARRIVAL

The report date is not the same as the course start date. The report date is one day prior to the course start date. Upon reporting, students will check-in with their respective detachments listed below for initial accountability.

At 0730, on the course start date, students will gather at the back-parking-lot entrance of the Defense Information School for initial check-in and begin their in-processing. See below for DIRECTIONS TO FORT GEORGE G. MEADE.

LATE ARRIVALS:

Students arriving late risk losing their course reservation to a person on the "standby" list. If you are going to be late, contact the DINFOS Registrar's Office at (301) 677-4343.

DURING THE COURSE

Course Overview

At the entry-level, Public Affairs Officers, senior noncommissioned officers and civilians attend the newly launched and redesigned PACS-Q course. The three-month course is divided into three functional areas. Functional area 1 [Foundations] is 23 training days of a *flipped-classroom* instruction model (self-study followed by instruction and demonstration), foundational studies, which include communication theory and planning, research and analysis, issues management, media engagement, public affairs writing, joint planning and communication integration in military operations. FA 2 [Scenario] is 10 training



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PUBLIC AFFAIRS

days in an immersive exercise scenario during which students act as public affairs/communication strategy officers focused on steady-state and event-driven injects. FA 3 [Integration] is seven training days of culminating activities, reflection and forward thinking during which students are required to submit a portfolio of communication products and deliver a capabilities board, where they will present their work and persuasively articulate their value to a board of instructors. **PACS-Q is rigorous and demanding**, focused on staff coordination and operational planning.

Normal classroom hours are 7:55 a.m. to 4 p.m. There are no evening or weekend classroom hours; however, students may have class assignments that require attention after 4 p.m. on school days and weekends. Students should plan on spending approximately 2-3 hours each weekday, after class, on homework and reading. Some weekend time will also be consumed by homework and class requirements.

On the afternoon of Day 1, all PACS-Q students will take the English & Writing Proficiency Test (EWPT). The EWPT is designed to assess a student's use of standard written English and their ability to assemble facts into a coherent written argument. Students will have an hour and a half to complete the test, which includes two sections: English Usage and Writing. The first part of the test, which is timed at 30 minutes, presents grammar, sentence structure and punctuation problems in a multiple-choice format. The second part of the test, which is timed at 60 minutes, requires each student to compose an essay in response to a prompt. Each student will be encouraged to use examples from his or her personal and professional experience to support a thesis. Any students who do not achieve a passing score will be offered remediation and will be scheduled for a retest. **Anyone who does not pass the EWPT on the second attempt may be academically eliminated from PACS-Q.**

ABSENCE POLICY:

Absences for non-emergency, personal reasons are not normally approved. Clear your schedule now. Absence requests will be reviewed individually and granted for emergencies only. Refer to the **course syllabus** for more details on the official schoolhouse policy.



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PUBLIC AFFAIRS

KEY COURSE EVENTS

- The course includes a day trip, contingent upon COVID-19 pandemic conditions, to the Pentagon as part of the Service Unique course curriculum. Students may drive, carpool or use public transportation (MARC/Metro). Students should keep all receipts for reimbursement on their final travel voucher.
- **Graduation** is scheduled for mid-day of the last day of the course, and it is a mandatory formation. **Do not schedule your return flight any earlier than 5 p.m. the day of graduation. You will not be released early to accommodate a flight booked prior to 5 p.m.** Guests are currently **not** permitted to DINFOS graduations due to the current COVID posture.
- **Army ACFT and height/weight requirements listed below.**

TECHNOLOGY REQUIREMENTS

You are not required to bring a computer, but it is encouraged if you have one at your disposal. **You will be provided a DINFOS-issued laptop on Day 1.** Wi-Fi will be available inside of DINFOS. If you do bring a computer, it should be loaded with Microsoft Word, PowerPoint and a web browser (preferably Google Chrome). We will be using Blackboard as the primary course delivery method. If you are unfamiliar with Blackboard, we will give you an overview of its use. The Google Suite is also used as the primary form of electronic communication between PACS-Q faculty and students.

UNIFORM AND CLOTHING REQUIREMENTS

DINFOS military students are expected to maintain their personal appearance in accordance with applicable service regulations. Officers and senior enlisted personnel are role models for the junior students in both appearance and conduct. Civilians are expected to be professional in appearance. **Students will observe DINFOS policy of wearing the Class B uniform or service equivalent on the last Friday of the month.**

****Navy students**: please ensure you bring Navy Service Uniform (NSU)/Khakis in addition to other uniform requirements mentioned below.

****Army students**: please bring full APFU (**shorts, t-shirt, white/black socks and sneakers, jacket and pants**).

For Daily Wear:

- All Services: Current Duty Uniform. Flight suits are not an authorized uniform at DINFOS.



DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
DEFENSE MEDIA ACTIVITY
DEFENSE INFORMATION SCHOOL
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PUBLIC AFFAIRS

- Civilians: Business casual. No jeans.

For Graduation:

- **Summer** (generally when Daylight Saving Time is in effect):
 - USA: Class B with ribbons (short sleeve shirt)
 - USMC: Service "C" (short sleeve shirt)
 - USN: Summer White with ribbons
 - USAF: Service Uniform "Blues" (short sleeve shirt)
 - USCG: Tropical Blue Long
 - Civilians: Conservative business suit
- **Winter** (generally when Standard Time is in effect):
 - USA: Army Service Uniform (ASU) or Army Garrison Service Uniform (AGSU)
 - USMC: Service Alpha (with jacket)
 - USN: Service Dress Blues (with ribbons)
 - USAF: Full Service Dress
 - USCG: Service Dress Blue
 - Civilians: Conservative business suit

BILLETING

Candlewood Suites (an IHG hotel) is located on Fort Meade. Please contact the hotel for reservations (<https://m.ihg.com/hotels/armyhotels/us/en/home>). If lodging is full, the staff will work with you to secure reservations at a hotel located off post. If you encounter problems with your reservation or have other questions about billeting, please contact your appropriate military detachment. **Billeting is funded by the student's service or home unit.**

RENTAL CARS

The Candlewood Suites hotel on base is located within walking distance of DINFOS. However, if you are billeted outside of the installation, a rental car is strongly recommended. **Rental cars are funded by your unit.** The DINFOS Registrar's Office does not provide statements related to or recommending rental car requirements.

HEALTH CARE

Kimbrough Ambulatory Care Center (KACC), located on Fort Meade, is not a full-service hospital and may not be able to provide the health care you require. However, Walter Reed National Military Medical Center and the Malcolm Grow Medical Clinics and Surgery Center at Andrews Air Force Base are within



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DEFENSE MEDIA ACTIVITY
DEFENSE INFORMATION SCHOOL
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PUBLIC AFFAIRS

driving distance. If you have specific healthcare issues, it would be best to call Kimbrough Ambulatory Care Center and/or your regional Tricare representative before you arrive. For government civilians who are enrolled in a health benefits plan, most plans are accepted at civilian facilities in this area. It is strongly recommended that you contact your insurance provider prior to arrival, in case medical care is needed while you are away from home. You may have to change your Tricare region prior to arrival at Fort Meade. Ensure you bring an adequate supply of any prescription medications.

REPORTING TO YOUR SERVICE DETACHMENTS

ALL STUDENTS: please visit the Defense Information School website at <https://www.dinfos.dma.mil/Coronavirus/> for questions about the schoolhouse vaccination posture. Current schoolhouse posture is in alignment with Department of Defense policy.

U.S. Marine Corps:

Bldg. 8545, 6th Armored Cavalry Rd., Fort Meade, MD
20755 Phone: (301) 677-7662/5188

Website: www.dinfos.dma.mil/Student-Info/Service-In-processing/Marines/

U.S. Navy: Bldg. 8479, 6th Armored Cavalry Rd., Fort Meade, MD 20755
Phone: (301) 677-6260/6283/6287

Website: www.dinfos.dma.mil/Student-Info/Service-In-processing/Navy/

U.S. Air Force: Bldg. 8478, 6th Armored Cavalry Rd., Fort Meade,
MD 20755 Phone: (301) 677-5053/5039/5055

Website: www.dinfos.dma.mil/Student-Info/Service-In-processing/Air-Force/

U.S. Army: Bldg. 8606, 6th Armored Cavalry Rd., Fort Meade, MD 20755
Phone: (301) 677-6167

Website: <https://www.dinfos.dma.mil/Student-Info/Service-In-processing/Army/>

Coast Guard: Bldg. 8545, 6th Armored Cavalry Rd., Fort Meade, MD 20755
Phone: (510) 890-6086

Website: www.dinfos.dma.mil/Student-Info/Service-In-processing/Coast-Guard/



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DEFENSE INFORMATION SCHOOL
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FORT MEADE, MD 20755-5620

PUBLIC AFFAIRS

ARMY STUDENTS ACFT TEST/WEIGH-IN

Army ACFT and Army height and weight standards are being enforced.

- All regular Army, Army National Guard and Army Reserve students are required meet the Army's body-fat standards as outlined in AR 600-9. **Students must wear their APFU (shorts, t-shirt, white/black socks and sneakers) for the weigh-in.** PACS-Q is an MOS-producing course, and therefore all students will be required to meet height and weight standards. For further information on this requirement, please review Army Regulation 350-1 and AR 600-9.
- All regular Army, Army National Guard and Army Reserve students are required to take the diagnostic ACFT conducted during the course. **Students must wear their APFU (shorts, t-shirt, white/black socks and sneakers) for the diagnostic.**

DINING FACILITY/COMMISSARY/EXCHANGE USE

Civilian students wishing to use the dining facility, the commissary or the post exchange will need to submit a copy of their orders to their detachment as well as to the Registrar's Office. The Registrar's Office will endorse orders for such access. All Service members on TDY orders MUST follow their orders in regards to MEALS and LODGING. Some students can anticipate a partial per diem for meals due to access to the Fort Meade dining facility.

PAY

Students must ensure that his/her DTS orders are properly configured and pay is properly arranged through their unit/organization before arrival.

DIRECTIONS TO FORT GEORGE G. MEADE

The address for DINFOS is: 6500 Mapes Road, Fort Meade, MD, 20755. You will need a valid DOD identification card to enter the base.

Caution: Mapping software like Google Maps may recommend a route through an unauthorized part of the base (i.e., National Security Agency). Do not proceed past signs saying "NSA EMPLOYEES ONLY." Even with a DOD ID card, you are not allowed to traverse through NSA areas, and you may be detained. To be safe, we recommend you enter through one of these three gates: Rockenbach



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PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Road, also known as MD-713 or Route 713 (on the northern part of the base), off of MD-175; or Mapes Road, off of MD-32 or Route 32 (on the southern part of the base). The Reece Road gate, off of MD-175, is closed to automobile traffic; however, the visitor center remains open.

Flying: If you arrive by commercial air, we recommend you fly into Baltimore/Washington International Airport (BWI). Fort George G. Meade is about 10 miles south of the airport. Military transportation is not available. Taxi service is available from BWI to Fort Meade at an estimated cost of \$20 for one person. A rental car may be beneficial if it is authorized on your orders. The other two major airports in the region, Ronald Reagan Washington National (DCA) and Washington Dulles International (IAD) airports, are a considerable distance from Fort Meade. Taxi fare from DCA is approximately \$65, while a taxi from IAD can run as high as \$150.

AFTER THE COURSE

The Army Public Affairs Center (APAC) in collaboration with the DINFOS Public Affairs and Communication Strategy Directorate is offering Army students (Uniform and GS) the opportunity to complete the required OPSEC II course here at Fort Meade for 3 days following PACS-Q graduation. APAC will send students a separate letter with further details with a point of contact. The course is not in ATRRS, nor is it in association with DINFOS, requiring students to plan additional TDY with their unit after PACS-Q. Per Army policy, only OPSEC II certified personnel can manage official social media, release information to the public, and fully complete the duties required as an effective Army PAO. *Don't miss this opportunity.*

TRANSCRIPTS

For information about transcripts see: <https://www.dinfos.dma.mil/Academics/Transcripts/>

QUESTIONS

Prior to arrival, students may contact the DINFOS Registrar's Office at (dma.meade.dinfos.list.registrar@mail.mil)

Strength Through Truth