

Defense Information School



Public Affairs & Communication Strategy Qualification Course Course Syllabus

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PACS Directorate Leadership Contact Information

Director: Army Maj. Matthew McMillan (mmcmillan@dinfos.edu)

Deputy Director: Mr. Thomas Fish (tfish@dinfos.edu)

Academic Director: Mr. Jeff Lacap (jlacap@dinfos.edu)

NCOIC: Navy Chief Petty Officer Timothy Black (tblack@dinfos.edu)

Course Overview

The Public Affairs and Communication Strategy Qualification Course (PACS-Q) provides entry-level public affairs and communication strategy training for the Department of Defense, U.S. government agencies, and selected foreign military professionals. Instruction focuses on the foundational elements of the communication planning process, principles and techniques associated with implementing effective communication strategies, and the processes involved in integrating communication into military planning and operations.

Course Objectives

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Provide communication strategy counsel to command and higher headquarters.
- Leverage relationships with the command, the community, the media, partners and stakeholders [influencers] to accomplish a mission.
- Employ a communication team in accordance with DoD and service policies and tactics, techniques and procedures to achieve the commander's desired end state.
- Communicate in steady-state and event-driven scenarios to accomplish missions.
- Execute communication tactics in alignment with the commander's desired state and higher-level guidance.

PACS-Q Critical Competencies

There are three critical competencies within the PACS-Q curriculum:

The **English & Writing Proficiency Test** is administered prior to Functional Area 1; the **Individual Communication Plan** falls within Functional Area 2; and the **Capabilities Board** falls within Functional Area 3. NOTE: An explanation of each functional area is provided in the section called Course Structure. In order for a student to remain in PACS-Q, he/she must pass all three critical competencies. Any student who does not receive a passing score on the first attempt at a critical competency will be placed on academic probation, offered remediation and a retest/resubmission of the failed critical competency. Any student who does not pass a retest/resubmission of a critical competency may be put up for academic elimination from PACS-Q. **Disclaimer: Intellectual development requires honesty, responsibility, and students doing their own work. The three critical competencies represent students' own work and ideas without the use of unpermitted aids and resources, which include input from fellow students, peers and former PACS-Q students.**

The first critical competency is the **English & Writing Proficiency Test (EWPT)**. The EWPT is designed to assess a student's use of standard written English and 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 experiences from his/her personal and professional lives to support a thesis. Any students who do not achieve a passing score will be offered remediation and will be scheduled for a retest. Any student who does not pass the EWPT on the second attempt may be academically eliminated from PACS-Q.

The second critical competency is the **Individual Communication Plan (COMMPLAN)** assignment. In this assignment, students will be using the COMMPLAN proposal in response to an issue facing his/her real-world command to develop a detailed COMMPLAN. Students will complete a well-developed and focused COMMPLAN that reflects their ability to effectively engage in the Research, Planning, Implementation and Evaluation (RPIE) process. To be successful on this assignment students must demonstrate their analytical skills and ability to create an effective plan for communicating with all stakeholders that aligns with their commander's desired state.

The third critical competency is the **Capabilities Board** assignment. In this assignment, students will demonstrate their communication leadership skills by delivering a persuasive brief to a board of instructors that explicitly articulates how they will use their public affairs/communication strategy capabilities to support their command's lines of effort to accomplish the mission. As a communication leader, students must understand: the function of military communication; the capabilities of their PA/CS staff; the commander's desired state and mission; the organization's role within higher strategy; the local information environment; and the development of communication products, plans and courses of action (COAs). Students will deliver a 10-minute brief that provides examples and highlights their public affairs and communication strategy leadership skills to the board. They will describe their personal communication capabilities based on the work they have done throughout the Foundations and Scenario phases of this course. Students should use appropriate examples that reveal their specific public affairs/communication strategy capabilities and strengths as a leader. In addition, students should persuasively articulate the value/capabilities they will bring back to their home unit/command (or next unit/command if they are attending PACS-Q en route.)

Course Structure

This course is divided into three academic phases or "functional areas" (FAs): Foundations, Scenario and Integration. Throughout these phases, students will learn writing, communication operations skills, and comprehensive use of communication techniques and strategies, with a focus on communication synchronization and critical thinking. A combination of facilitated discussions, scenarios and exercises creates an active learning environment, with the use and application of social media techniques integrated throughout the course. During the course, students will also have the opportunity to break into service-specific groups to focus on each service's unique doctrine, policies, and tactics, techniques and procedures.

FA 1: Foundations (Training Days 1-28)

Foundations introduces students to the overall concepts and learning objectives for the course by engaging them in the analysis of real-world events and case studies, comprehensive

decision-making exercises, and active classroom-based learning experiences. Everything that the students experience in this functional area is intended to prepare them for hands-on immersive learning in FA2: Scenario. Therefore, students practice critical skills that they will need to be successful such as: research, nesting and alignment, communication planning, and crafting operational documents. Time is also set aside to allow students the opportunity to get their feet wet engaging in more tactical skills, specifically media capture and accessioning, writing for both internal and external audiences, and news media engagement.

FA 2: Scenario (Training Days 29-38)

Scenario provides students with an authentic learning opportunity to put the knowledge and skills they learned in FA1: Foundations to the test by simulating a joint public affairs and communication strategy shop operating out of Eastern Europe. As per the scenario, over 70% of a new standing Joint Task Force has arrived in Pirtuni under a U.S. and Pirtunian agreement creating U.S. permanent military bases (enduring military presence) in Chipansk, Pirtuni, and two other locations. The JTF's primary focus is on deterrence and enhancing the countries' alliance while strengthening NATO's eastern flank, composed of the Baltic states and Pirtuni. Students will be confronted with a mixture of steady-state and event-driven injects that they must respond to, all while attempting to manage their team operations and mission with efficiency. In FA2, students' military communication practices and habits will be honed. Solid research methods, savvy relationship building, and thorough analysis and planning skills will be crucial for students to successfully navigate the scenario.

FA 3: Integration (Training Days 39-45)

Integration allows the students to process and observe the knowledge that they have gained over the previous eight weeks of training. Students will engage in reflective self-analysis exercises that promote metacognition and give them the confidence to claim their role as communication leaders. This final functional area is called "Integration" because it bridges the gap between Foundations, Scenario, and the students' future careers. Implementing evidence and learning from their experiences in the previous functional areas, students will now be called to orient themselves within the current information environment, communicate their value to command, and set their sights on future opportunities for growth and professional development.

Technical Requirements/Skills

During the course, students will use the following technologies/programs:

- Laptop computers
- Google Suite (including Gmail, Drive, Classroom, Slides, Sheets and Docs)
- Blackboard learning management system
- SimulationDeck, an exercise simulation software

Navigating Blackboard

Throughout this course, students will be using the Blackboard learning management system to complete and submit assignments. To access Blackboard, log onto dinfos.blackboard.com. Even if students are familiar with Blackboard, they are encouraged to watch the brief tutorials in the “Welcome - Start Here” folder, which will help them navigate the course.

Participation & Attendance

Throughout the course, students will be assessed by instructors, their peers and themselves on the quality of participation and preparedness demonstrated during practice and performance exams, group activities, discussions, Blackboard assignments, and more during PACS-Q. Along with evaluating themselves, students are also responsible for rating the group performance of peers within assigned groups for some assignments. Ultimately, students will be scored by their instructor, using the provided grading rubric. Students will receive one participation grade per Functional Area.

Class begins at 0755 each weekday morning and ends at 1600, unless otherwise indicated. Students will get regularly scheduled breaks throughout the training day, including one hour for lunch. The training schedule may change due to unforeseen circumstances; if this happens, the lead instructor will notify the class.

Students are expected to be in their assigned classroom on time and ready for each day's lesson. If students are going to be late, they should notify their designated student class leader with an explanation for their tardiness and expected arrival time. Continued or excessive tardiness may result in administrative discipline and could lead to elimination from the course.

Students will not be excused from class except for sickness, emergencies or pre-approved appointments. Absences of more than one academic day for other than medical reasons must be coordinated through the academic director and approved in advance by the PACS director. If students must miss class, either scheduled or unscheduled, they shall notify their designated student class leader. The student leader will tell the lead instructor, who will coordinate makeup instruction with the academic director.

Students are expected to give their best effort throughout the course, including discussions, classwork, and assignments.

Assignments & Grading

Students should expect to spend 12-15 hours a week outside of class to complete assigned readings, homework and other assignments, and to prepare for class discussion. Students must achieve and maintain a 70% or better academic average in each of the three phases to graduate

from the course. **All assignments, which include but are not limited to: feedback-only assignments, graded and recorded assignments, drafts, proposals or critical competencies are REQUIRED to be turned in.** If a student fails to turn in any assignment, due to student negligence or otherwise, the student will be formally counseled. If the pattern of behavior continues, a student may be recommended for elimination from the course.

Academic Recognition

Students are recognized for academic and professional success during the course in a variety of ways. Students whose final grades are among the top 10% in the class will be recognized as honor graduates, while the student with the highest overall grade point average will be recognized as the distinguished honor graduate. Additionally, there are two named awards selected by instructors:

- The **Maj. Megan McClung Award** may be awarded to a military student. The recipient of this award embodies the traits of putting others first, getting the job done and accepting challenges with grace. This student also exudes professionalism and leads from the front.
- The **Joseph Galloway Award** may be awarded to a civilian student. The recipient of this award is positive, energetic, engaging, and determined to master the fundamentals of public affairs/communication strategy. This student readily works with other class members to help enhance their understanding, shows excellence in all performance areas, and does outstanding work as a peer leader and mentor.

Late or Missed Work

Students are expected to turn in all assignments on time. If an assignment is turned in up to 24 hours late, students can only achieve a maximum grade of 70% on that assignment. Assignments turned in later than 24 hours after the due date will receive a zero, unless a prior agreement with the lead instructor has been made.

Additional Training (Make Up/Remedial)

Instructors may hold additional training sessions for students who need extra practice or remediation, or must make up missed work. These sessions will be scheduled as needed so as not to interfere with regularly scheduled lessons or classwork.

Academic Probation and/or Elimination

Any time a student's academic average drops below 75% in any one of the functional areas, he/she will be placed on academic probation and will be counseled in writing. Students will remain on probation until there is no longer a risk that they will not graduate from the course.

Students may resubmit a failed assignment for a maximum score of 70%. The resubmitting of any assignment will be determined in conjunction with the lead instructor and academic director. This option may only be exercised twice.

If at any time it becomes mathematically impossible for a student to raise his/her grade above 70%, he/she will be recommended for academic elimination from the course.

Administrative Probation and/or Elimination

Students who violate the standards of conduct or fraternization will be disciplined and may be placed on administrative probation. Disciplinary counseling(s) and/or administrative probations may lead to elimination from the course. Administrative probations will be reviewed weekly. Students may be removed from probation status at the discretion of PACS leadership. If a student does not correct the behavior, he/she may face administrative elimination from the course.

Creating an Environment for Learning

Students are expected to be respectful of instructors and fellow classmates. The classroom should be a place where students can freely share ideas and different points of view. It is not necessary to agree, but it is necessary to listen respectfully. Debate is healthy; students should state their viewpoint and be prepared to back it with evidence. Students shall always be respectful of other students' views and focus their disagreements on ideas, not on people.

Students should feel free to ask questions at the appropriate times, especially if they don't understand something, and listen to the questions of other students. Instructors want students to ask questions relevant to the material, and to answer questions that have been asked, but students should always be mindful and respectful of others who may want to share.

Students shall avoid distracting others or interrupting learning. If students must have their phone on, they should keep it on vibrate and leave class if they receive an emergency call.

Ethics & Plagiarism

DINFOS enforces a zero-tolerance policy for plagiarism, copyright infringement, fabrication and cheating. Plagiarism is clearly defined on the plagiarism statement students sign during in-processing.

Students will complete all assignments and exercises individually as original work, unless otherwise assigned as a group project. Students may use appropriate facts, ideas, news events, quotations, and copyrighted or credited material, as long as appropriate attribution is provided. DINFOS uses American Psychological Association style for citations, as appropriate.

Students will not share any work, including test or exercise materials, with other students or anyone outside DINFOS. No one is permitted to take screenshots or otherwise try to capture online exercise and/or test materials. If students are unsure whether or not something is allowed, they should ask an instructor. Students' work will be analyzed by *BlackBoard's Safe Assign* feature to detect recycled content.

General Standard of Conduct

Students are responsible for adherence to the highest standards of official personal behavior while attending DINFOS, according to service regulations and the Uniform Code of Military Justice. Officers, NCOs and civilian students will, at all times, conduct themselves in a professional and uncompromising manner in their dealings with DINFOS students, staff and faculty. Profanity and inappropriate language, gestures and behavior are prohibited.

Classroom Management/Cleanliness/Food and Drink Policies

All staff and students are charged with maintaining a clean and safe training environment. Instructors and class leaders will direct student general clean-up activities throughout the training day, to include policing training areas, placing trash and recyclables in proper containers, and wiping tables or workstations, as required.

Drinking at workstations is permitted only if the beverage is in a **closed container**. No mugs, cups or canned drinks are allowed at workstations; these items must be kept in a designated area in the classroom away from electronics.

Eating small snacks at workstations is permitted, as long as it does not distract from learning or create a large mess. Students must clean up after themselves, or risk forfeiting eating and drinking privileges in the classroom. Meals may **ONLY** be consumed in the classroom during the scheduled lunch break.

Classroom clean-up conducted daily:

- Return all furniture to the original configuration to include placing chairs under desks.
- Remove all excess training materials and trash from the classroom. Trash from the classrooms must be deposited in the designated receptacles outside of the building, and will not be placed in hallway or bathroom receptacles.
- Erase and clean all marker boards. [unless directed otherwise]
- Power off all electrical equipment, except computers. Turn off lights and monitors.
- Classroom equipment and furniture are arranged to meet the general training requirements for classrooms and labs. Furniture such as chairs moved for special exercises will be returned to the original configuration. No property may be taken from classrooms without the permission of the room hand-receipt holder. Personnel who remove property or equipment without permission will be held liable for any loss or damage.
- Take out trash
- Clean and sanitize communal supply areas and remove perishable foods
- Wipe and sanitize all desks Classrooms should be vacuumed weekly.

Dress Code

Students must adhere to the DINFOS dress code and service regulations, unless otherwise indicated. Service members will wear their working/field uniforms and remain in compliance with grooming standards. Civilians will wear business casual attire. **Jeans, T-shirts, loungewear and athletic attire are never permitted during class time.**

Fraternization

The relationship between permanent party personnel and students will remain strictly professional. Unofficial socializing and undue familiarity, real or perceived, degrade leadership and interfere with command authority, mission effectiveness and morale. Conduct, both on and off duty, must reflect an appropriate professional relationship. Any action or relationship that gives the appearance of impropriety is in violation of DINFOS and DOD policies. Common sense and sound judgment must prevail in all business, social and personal contacts among school staff, faculty and students.

Students and instructors should not associate privately through social media during the

course. Students may send instructors friend requests on social media once they have graduated; however, instructors are not allowed to send requests to current or former students.

If any student has an existing personal or professional relationship with any instructor prior to attending this course, he/she should notify his/her lead instructor. An instructor wishing to associate with students outside of school hours can submit an off-duty association memo to the director of PACS for approval. The memo should justify the reason for the off-duty association.

Care of Government-Issued Equipment

All students will be issued a laptop for use during the course. Once students take custody of government-issued equipment, they will each sign a hand receipt and become fully responsible for maintaining the equipment until it is turned in. This means students may be found financially and/or legally responsible if the equipment is lost, stolen or damaged. In the event something happens to any government-issued equipment, students must notify their lead instructor immediately.

Gift Giving

Instructors are only allowed to accept gifts from students at graduation. Gifts cannot exceed the cash value of \$20, nor contain alcohol or contraband, in accordance with the Code of Federal Regulations and Joint Ethics Regulation.

School Delays/Closures

In the event of inclement weather or other unscheduled school closures/delayed openings, students will be notified by their designated student class leader. Delay and closure information is also available at (301) 677-6323.

Directorate leaders will determine the course of action to make up for lost training time on a case-by-case basis. This may include extended training hours during the week or on weekends.

Illness and Medical/Dental Appointments

Students should not come to class if they are feeling sick. If students start to feel ill, they should notify their student team lead and go seek medical attention, as per instructions from their service detachment. Ill students must obtain a note documenting their medical visit and detailing any further instructions, especially if they are confined to quarters/quarantined for any length of time.

Students shall not schedule routine medical or dental appointments during class time unless they have a documented pre-existing condition that requires routine care. If students must schedule an appointment, they should make every effort to be seen outside of class time. Except for illness or emergencies, all appointments scheduled during class must be pre-approved by students' lead instructor.

Pay Issues

If students are experiencing pay issues, they should consult their appropriate service detachment or contact the Fort Meade Finance Office at (301) 677-7781 or 7785. The office is located on the first floor of the Fort Meade Military Personnel Office at 2234 Huber Road and is open from 0730-1530 Monday-Friday.

If students must miss class to resolve a pay issue, they should coordinate with their lead instructor before scheduling such an appointment.

Other Important Contact Information:

- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: (800) 273-8255
- Veteran's Crisis Line: (800) 273-8255
- DoD Safe Helpline (available 24/7): (877) 995-5247
- Military OneSource: (800) 342-9647
- DINFOS Equal Opportunity POC: Sgt. 1st Class Sherrod Percell, spercell@dinfos.edu
- DINFOS Chaplain: USN Lt. Cmdr. Jose Jimenez, (301) 677-4426, jjimenez@dinfos.edu
- DINFOS Sexual Assault Prevention/Response (SAPR) Victim Advocates:
 - USA Staff Sgt. Cody Ewing, dbeamon@dinfos.edu
 - USAF Master Sgt. Donald Sheppard, dsheppard@dinfos.edu
 - USN Petty Officer 1st Class Cyrus Gil Roson, croson@dinfos.edu
 - USN Petty Officer 1st Class Christopher Janik, cjanik@dinfos.edu
 - USMC Staff Sgt. Allison Lotz, alotz@dinfos.edu

Safety Procedures

In case of emergencies, the following protocol should be followed:

- Active Shooter - Students and instructors will lock classroom doors, cover any windows, and shelter in place. If not in class when an active shooter event begins, students and instructors shall take shelter in the nearest safe area. Do not shelter in bathrooms.
- Medical Emergency - Bystanders should call 911 immediately then notify any DINFOS staff member.
- Non-Emergency Medical Care - Students should render aid if possible and notify the lead instructor to determine the next appropriate course of action.
- Hazardous Weather - In the event of a thunderstorm, students shall remain indoors and away from exterior walls and windows until the storm has passed. In the event of a tornado, move to a safe area within the building. Go to a lower floor and preferably an interior room without windows.

- Fire - Students and instructors will exit the building immediately, using the nearest exit, and muster for accountability at the designated PACS rally point. Please see the following map for details:

