Defense Information School

6500 Mapes Road, Fort Meade, Maryland 20755

Public Affairs & Communication Strategy Qualification Course (PACS-Q) Distance Learning (DL) Training Program of Instruction

Training Effective Date: 01 October 2025
Supersedes TPI Dated: 01 October 2020

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Commandant

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Change Page

Change 1: October 2024. This TPI includes a new Directed Independent Study design in Phase I. The completion window for Phase 1 has been extended from 24 weeks to 10-months to improve annual student throughput and administrative management.

Change 2: October 2025. The measurement plan has been revised to align with the resident version of this course.

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Course Preface

Purpose

This course provides entry-level public affairs training for mid-to senior-level non-commissioned officers (NCOs) and commissioned officers from all U.S. Armed Forces and select foreign nations selected for public affairs. This course will provide foundational concepts and skills needed by NCOs, officers and civilians to perform the basic duties of Department of Defense (DoD) military public affairs practitioners.

Implementation Date

1 October 2025

Training Delivery / Training Length

Distance Learning / 9 months

Resident / 10 days

IMPORTANT: Students must complete Phases 1 & 2 within the same fiscal year to receive a diploma.

Course Description

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

Service Prerequisites

Refer to Army Training Requirements and Resources System (ATRRS) site: https://www.atrrs.army.mil/atrrscc/ School code 212.

USA			Notes:
Officer	O-3 through O-4		• Must have completed Officer Basic Course before submitting into ATRRS. Must meet height and weight standard IAW AR 600-9. Must pass a record fitness test before graduation. • APAC is the Approving Authority for Army Waivers.
Enlisted NGB USAR	E-7 through E-8 E-8 through E-9 E-8 through E-9		• Must have completed required PME level; validated by APAC; control branch 46. • Non-control branch filing valid CMF 46 position; endorsed by NGB, validated by APAC • Non-control branch 46 filling valid CMF position; endorsed by USAR, validated by APAC • APAC is the Approving Authority for Army Waivers.
USAF			Notes:
Officer	O-1 through O-5		• Officers must have Air Force Specialty Code (AFSC) 35X.
Enlisted	E-7 through E-9		• Enlisted must have 3N0XX AFSC, with Secretary of the Air Force/Public Affairs (SAF/PA) concurrence.
Civilian	GS-7/equivalent and above		• OPM Occupational series 1035, or with SAF/PA waiver
USN			Notes:
Officer	O-1 through O-4		
Enlisted	E-5 through E-9		• Enlisted must be a Mass Communication Specialist.
Civilian	GS-7/equivalent and above		• Includes interns. All must be in a public affairs field (GS-1035, 1082, 1083, and 1087 or 0301 with CHINFO approval).

USMC		Notes:
Officer	WO-1 through O-4	
Enlisted	E-6 select and above	● Must have Military Occupational Specialty 45XX
Civilian	N/A	● Civilian prerequisites are based on their billet
USCG		**Notes:**
Officer	O-1 through O-5	● Prerequisites are based on their billet description and authorization from CG092.
Enlisted	E5 through E9	● Prerequisites are based on their billet description and authorization from CG092.
Civilian	GS-7/equivalent and above	● Must be a U.S. Government employee working in the Public Affairs (PA) career field (GS-1035).

International Prerequisites

Students must have a solid understanding of English language usage, grammar and syntax. Students must score an 85 on the English Comprehension Level (ECL) test; have completed Specialized English Training (SET); obtain a score of $2^+/2^+$ on the Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) and have basic keyboard skills.

Interagency Prerequisites

Effective July 1, 2024, DINFOS no longer accepts interagency requests for DINFOS course registrations. DINFOS will continue its agreement with the Veterans Administration on a space available basis. The Registrar is the POC for all interagency inquiries.

Point of Contact (POC)

The POC for this Training Program of Instruction is the Course Development Office: staffprovostcdo@dinfos.edu.

For registration information, contact the DINFOS Registrar: dma.meade.dinfos.list.registrar@mail.mil

Training Task Inventory

This Training Task Inventory (TTI) incorporates feedback from the Career Field Managers. Learning outcomes are aligned with the Public Affairs Training and Education Council's Military Communication Competency Model.

Terminal Learning Objectives	Competency	Training Importance High, Medium, Low				
Enabling Objectives	**Knowledge / Performance**	**USA**	**USAF**	**USMC**	**USN**	**USCG**
1. Provide communication strategy counsel to command and higher headquarters	P	H	H	H	H	H
1.1 Reference applicable guidance, policies, and historical precedent to inform command-level decisions		H	H	H	H	H
1.2 Advise commander on aspects of the information environment relevant to their operations (e.g., disinformation, misinformation, propaganda)		H	H	H	H	H
1.3 Coordinate communication activities in participation with information-related capabilities and operational planners, other partners		H	H	H	H	H
1.4 Counsel the commander on the impact of proposed COAs and command policy		H	H	H	H	H
2. Leverage relationships with the command, the community, the media, partners, and stakeholders [influencers] to accomplish a mission	P	H	H	H	H	H
2.1 Identify strategies for building relationships with the command, the community, the media, partners, and stakeholders [influencers] to facilitate effective communication		H	H	H	H	H
2.2 Provide truthful, accurate, and timely public communication that aligns with commander's objectives and higher-level guidance		H	H	H	H	H
2.3 Safeguard sensitive and privileged information		H	H	H	H	H
2.4 Describe cultural characteristics that affect cognition and emotion		H	H	H	H	H

3. Employ a communication team in accordance with DoD and service policies and tactics, techniques and procedures to achieve commander's desired end state	**P**	**H**	**H**	**H**	**H**	**H**
3.1 Determine the requirements of the mission		H	H	H	H	H
3.2 Identify capabilities and resources		H	H	H	H	H
3.3 Identify gaps in capabilities and resources		H	H	H	H	H
3.4 Make recommendations for gap remediation		H	H	H	H	H
3.5 Prioritize activities based on available capabilities and resources		H	H	H	H	H
3.6 Communicate link between team operations, commander's desired state, and higher-level guidance		H	H	H	H	H
3.7 Assess team performance based on mission requirements		H	H	H	H	H
4. Communicate in steady state and event-driven scenarios in order to accomplish missions	**P**	**H**	**H**	**H**	**H**	**H**
4.1 Identify informational and operational factors that impact command through environmental scanning		H	H	H	H	H
4.2 Forecast communication challenges/opportunities that may impact the command and key publics		H	H	H	H	H
4.3 Match current and emerging communication practices to publics		H	H	H	H	H
4.4 Write a communication plan that aligns with commander's desired state and higher-level guidance		H	H	H	H	H
4.5 Write documents to support the JPP (e.g. PA Estimate, PA Annex, PPAG)		H	H	H	H	H

Task						
4.6 Write MOEs and MOPs based on commander's desired state and higher-level guidance for a command-level challenge/opportunity		H	H	H	H	H
4.7 Adjust the communication plan based on relevant data (e.g., assessment against MOPs/MOEs and environmental scanning)		M	H	H	H	H
4.8 Communicate ethically in accordance with PA/VI guidance, federal law, and DoD and service policies		H	H	H	H	H
5. Provide communication tactics in alignment with commander's desired end state and higher-level guidance	**P**	**H**	**H**	**H**	**H**	**H**
5.1 Develop communication products in accordance with DoD and service policies, VI Styleguide, and/or AP Stylebook where appropriate		H	H	H	H	H
5.2 Proofread communication products for proper spelling, grammar, and syntax		H	H	H	H	H
5.3 Accession, market, and distribute communication products		H	H	H	H	H
5.4 Write executive communications		H	H	H	H	H
5.5 Engage in a digital environment		H	H	H	H	H
5.6 Facilitate media engagements		H	H	H	H	H
5.7 Conduct media engagements		H	H	H	H	H
5.8 Facilitate key influencer engagements		H	H	H	H	H

Course Outline

This course is delivered in two phases: Phase One is the online (non-resident) portion, consisting of five online asynchronous modules, and Phase Two, which are the mandatory, in-resident scenario-based learning exercises conducted at the Defense Information School (DINFOS).

PHASE 1: Online (Non-Resident) **Academic Hours: 126**

This non-resident phase is divided into 5 modules, further subdivided into units. Students must complete all units within each of the five modules in sequential order as presented in the online distribution platform. All online coursework must be completed within a nine-month timeframe between October to July. The course sequence adheres to the Research, Planning, Implementation and Evaluation (RPIE) process, which guides public affairs professionals through key steps. These include determining the organization's function and purpose, and how PA supports these; researching stakeholders affected by the organization's Lines of Effort and mission, including their interests, concerns, and preferred communication channels; developing a targeted communication plan to change stakeholder Knowledge, Attitudes, and Behaviors (KABs) using these channels; creating strategies and tactics to engage stakeholders; and establishing evaluation criteria to measure the effectiveness of the communication campaign. Students develop and present a capabilities board as the culminating activity for Phase One.

Module 1: Foundations **Academic Hours: 21.25**

Students are introduced to the foundations of public affairs, including overall concepts and the language of military planning. Time allotted for completion: 1 month.

Module 2: Communication Plan **Academic Hours: 55.5**

Students learn the Research, Planning, Implementation and Evaluation (RPIE) process, and then apply this process to develop a detailed individual communication plan. Students learn the basic process to approach a command problem and/or initiative through the public communication lens. Time allotted for completion: 4 months.

Module 3: PA Operations **Academic Hours: 18**

Students learn the key aspects of public affairs/communication strategy operations. Allotted time for completion: 2 months.

Module 4: Tactics **Academic Hours: 23.25**

The curriculum includes media query handling, news release planning and execution, incident response strategies, media engagement, and preparing commanders for public interactions. Additionally, students are introduced to AP Style and other guidelines for clear and familiar formats, covering issues like security, accuracy, propriety, and policy. Time allotted for completion: 1.5 months.

Module 5: Capstone **Academic Hours: 8**

As part of the capstone event, students will engage in a self-reflective exercise, and detail how they will apply their learning to their future careers. The culminating activity requires students to demonstrate their ability to nest their command's priorities with higher level guidance and priorities. In a 10-minute presentation they prepare and deliver to a leadership board, they demonstrate their public affairs and

communication strategy expertise and leadership skills. Using work from throughout the course, students will showcase and persuasively articulate the value and capabilities they will bring to their unit or command. Allotted time for completion: 2 weeks.

PHASE 2: Scenario (Resident at DINFOS)   **Academic Hours: 40**

The scenario provides an opportunity to apply the knowledge and skills learned in Phase 1 in a simulated joint information center operating within fictional notional lands. Students are presented with a mixture of steady-state and event-driven injects that they must respond to, all while managing their team's operations and mission. Students develop and hone military communication practices, and must employ research methods, relationship building, and analysis and planning skills to navigate the scenario successfully.

Students must complete Phase 2 during the same year they complete Phase 1, and must complete both Phase 1 and Phase 2 to earn full credit. No credit is given to students for only completing Phase 1.

Course Administration   **Academic Hours: 0**

The course administration hours include student in- and out-processing, gear issue and graduation.

                                                                                       Total Course Hours: 292

Measurement Plan

This Measurement Plan establishes procedures for evaluating student achievement of objectives in the PACS-Q-DL course. All summative assessments are a permanent part of students' academic records and count toward their final grade. Each assessment is weighted to indicate its relative importance to the overall course grade.

Academic Standard:

1. This is a qualification course. The minimum passing score for each evaluated item is 70%. The maximum score on a re-administered exam meeting the minimum standard is 70 percent. Students must achieve a minimum passing score on each assessment before progressing in the course.

2. All students must complete Phase 2 *within the same fiscal year*.

Recycles/Elimination:

Students are eligible for administrative recycling at the recommendation of the AD. The Service is responsible for obtaining a seat in a later iteration. There are no options for academic recycles.

Phase 1: Online (Non-Resident)				Weight 90%

Module 1: Foundations

Students must pass each unit test with a minimum score of 70% to continue in the course.
Module 1 quizzes, activities and exercises are not calculated into the Measurement Plan.

Module 2: Communication Plan

Assessment		TLOs Tested	Performance Outcome	Weight
Performance Examination	Environmental Scanning Log	1.0 Provide communication strategy counsel to command and higher headquarters	Students provide communication strategy counsel and apply critical thinking by exploring, analyzing, and prioritizing data across multiple platforms in the information environment, and preparing an environmental scanning log for their leadership.	9%
Assessment		TLOs Tested	Performance Outcome	Weight
Performance Examination	Issue Analysis	4.0 Communicate in steady-state and event-driven scenarios in order to accomplish missions	Students use a case study approach to define public affairs issues, and use critical thinking to prepare an issue analysis, then develop three viable Courses of Action (COAs) that reflect their ability to identify and analyze the issue, stakeholders, impact to the organization, and the associated tactics for each COA.	9%
Performance Examination	Communication Plan	4.0 Communicate in steady-state and event-driven scenarios in order to accomplish missions	Students employ critical thinking and strategic analysis to develop a concise and focused Communication Plan (CommPlan) proposal, including themes, messages, and talking points, stakeholder analysis, strategies and tactics, and an implementation and evaluation plan against SMART objectives.	13%

Module 3: Operations

Assessment		TLOs Tested	Performance Outcome	Weight
Performance Examination	Public Affairs Guidance (PAG)	4.0 Communicate in steady-state and event-driven scenarios in order to accomplish missions	Based on a provided scenario, students develop Proposed Public Affairs Guidance in support of mission goals and is reflective of higher-level guidance. he following: Key stakeholders, public statements, themes and messages, questions and answers, and a digital media plan.	8%
Assessment		TLOs Tested	Performance Outcome	Weight
Performance Examination	Briefing Card	1.0 Communicate in steady-state and event driven scenarios in order to accomplish missions	Students will be evaluated on their ability to prepare themes, messages and talking points for use by organizational leadership during public-facing engagements.	8%

Assessment		TLOs Tested	Performance Outcome	Weight
Performance Examination	Public Affairs Estimate	3.0 Employ a communication team in accordance with DoD and service policies and tactics, techniques and procedures to achieve commander's desired state	Using a provided operations order and scenario, students will be evaluated on their ability to create a Public Affairs Estimate. Students will assess a specific mission from a public affairs perspective and must draft a proposed mission statement and detail how Public Affairs will support the course of action (COA).	5%
Assessment		**TLOs Tested**	**Performance Outcome**	**Weight**
Performance Examination	Public Affairs Annex	4.0 Communicate in steady-state and event-driven scenarios in order to accomplish missions	Using the prescribed 5-paragraph joint publication format, students write a Public Affairs Annex, including how PA efforts will be managed during an operation, and include any needed appendices and attachments to make the document comprehensive.	4%
Assessment		**TLOs Tested**	**Performance Outcome**	**Weight**
Performance Examination	Communication Plan Summary and Briefing	1.0 Provide communication strategy counsel to command and higher headquarters	Students will prepare an executive summary for a communication plan, then prepare and deliver a 5-10 minute briefing for a commander summarizing their research, SMART objectives, target audiences, and their implementation and evaluation plan.	4%
Module 4: Tactics				
Assessment		**TLOs Tested**	**Performance Outcome**	**Weight**
Performance Examination	Writing Portfolio	5.0 Provide communication tactics in alignment with commander's desired state and higher-level guidance	Students compile a portfolio of the communication products they produced throughout Module 4. The portfolio must include one each of these communication products: Media Advisory, News Release, Initial Incident Release, and Incident Follow-Up Release.	5%
Assessment		**TLOs Tested**	**Performance Outcome**	**Weight**
Performance Examination	Subject Matter Expert Brief	5.0 Provide communication tactics in alignment with commander's desired state and higher-level guidance	Students coordinate communication activities and prepare a Subject Matter Expert (SME) for an upcoming media engagement; they will produce related interview information and materials, and share talking points and related messages in support of communication objectives.	10%
Assessment		**TLOs Tested**	**Performance Outcome**	**Weight**
Performance Examination	Media Engagement	5.0 Provide communication tactics in alignment with commander's desired state and higher-level guidance	Students prepare for and actively participate in an interview in which they role-play as the PAO/CommStrat Officer of a fictional command. They use their skills in research, environmental scanning, interviewing basics and media engagement to answer questions about the establishment of the command.	5%

Module 5: Capstone				
Assessment		**TLOs Tested**	**Performance Outcome**	**Weight**
Performance Examination	Self-Assessment	All TLOs	As part of a capstone event, students complete a self-reflective exercise reviewing their progress throughout the course and explicitly discuss how they intend to implement the lessons into their careers.	5%
Assessment		**TLOs Tested**	**Performance Outcome**	**Weight**
Performance Examination	Capabilities Board	1.0 Provide communication strategy counsel to command and higher headquarters	The culminating activity requires students to demonstrate their ability to nest their command's priorities with higher level guidance and priorities. They prepare and deliver a 10-minute briefing to a leadership board showcasing their public affairs and communication strategy expertise and leadership skills. Drawing upon work they have completed throughout the course, their presentation will highlight and persuasively articulate the value and capabilities they will bring to their unit or command.	15%
Phase 2: Scenario (Resident at DINFOS)				**Weight 10%**
Assessment		**TLOs Tested**	**Performance Outcome**	**Weight**
Performance Examination	Operational Exercise	All TLOs	Students will work in teams and integrate communication research, data and analysis into operational planning, and coordinate with other information forces to execute operations in a simulated task force/information environment in support of the commander's intent, lines of effort and objectives.	100%

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