

# “US VERSUS THEM” SPIRIT CHANGES AFTER COURSE

## *DSMC Gaming in Classes Offers an Open Environment for Sharing Ideas*

*Vincent P. Grimes*

**W**alking into a class at the Defense Systems Management College (DSMC) to see Pentagon acquisition professionals and industry managers building toy pup tents makes one wonder how effectively public money is being spent. Seeing acquisition managers sitting around a table rolling dice and moving poker chips from one place to another also may raise eyebrows.

There is a method to this madness at DSMC. Professors blend hands-on activities with lessons on manufacturing principles and management philosophies. According to those attending courses, this teaching style is more interesting, informative, and leaves a stronger impression than training programs regarded by participants as “death by viewgraph.” Classes are not exercises in learning how to fill out forms.

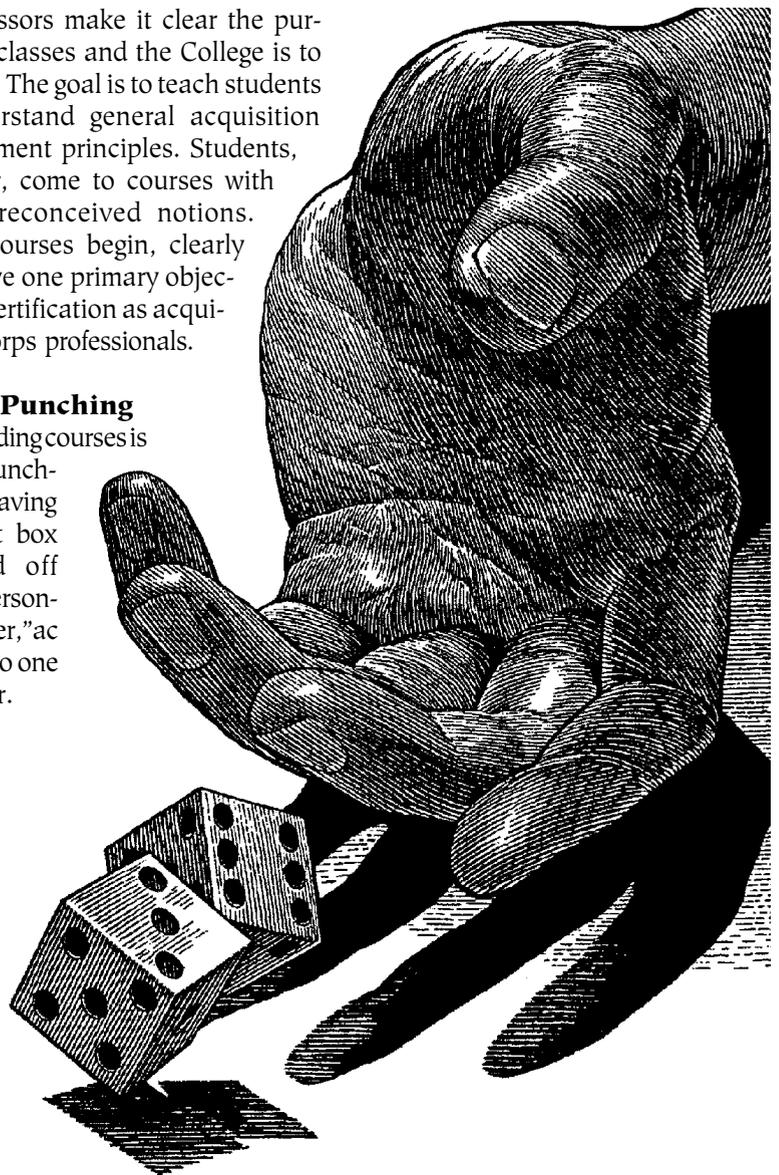
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*Mr. Grimes is currently the Senior Writer, National DEFENSE magazine. He initially wrote a similar article describing his experiences as a former DSMC graduate of the Level II Defense Manufacturing Management Course (DMMC). When the Course Director, Lt. Col. George A. Noyes III, spotted the article in National DEFENSE magazine, we contacted Mr. Grimes for a follow-up. The course is now offered at the Air Force Institute of Technology (AFIT).*

Professors make it clear the purpose of classes and the College is to educate. The goal is to teach students to understand general acquisition management principles. Students, however, come to courses with some preconceived notions. When courses begin, clearly they have one primary objective — certification as acquisition corps professionals.

### **Ticket Punching**

Attending courses is “ticket punching or having the right box checked off in the personnel folder,” according to one professor.



Another gives a similar view: "Some government students consider a DSMC course an unwanted diversion from their jobs."

During the courses, attitudes and prejudices change. The teaching environment and the classroom interaction are responsible in large part for the altered mindset.

A reason for the changing attitude is the College's longstanding policy of non-attribution for speakers, professors and students. The policy promotes an environment for the free and open exchange of information and ideas. The students say the ability to speak freely and provide personal experiences enriches the class.

Another factor in the shifting attitudes is the student mix. In each course, approximately seven percent come from industry. The remainder are military and civilian professionals from often competing Army, Navy, Air Force and Defense Department agencies.

Some tension and a bit of surprise are evident when the military's acquisition students discover several of their classmates come from industry. The adversarial relationship that has developed between the two groups is initially evident.

In discussions with professors, it becomes clear that bringing together people from government and industry serves a vital function. As courses progress, the interaction between the students leads to a better understanding of the interrelationship between all the parts of the acquisition, development and manufacturing process.

### **Attitude Change**

Brig. Gen. Claude M. Bolton, Jr., USAF, DSMC Commandant, says his perception before taking a course at the College was that "industry was out to take advantage of the government." However, the students from the defense industry and the College

helped change his attitude. "At the end of the course I realized that you depend on contractors, and they are honest people trying to do the best they can in a complex atmosphere," Gen. Bolton recalls.

Classes also provide opportunities for Defense Department representatives at commercial manufacturing plants to discuss acquisition policy issues with their colleagues involved in program management and contracting.

A point made throughout the courses is understanding the relationships between a system's cost, production run and performance characteristics. The basic economic law of decreased production rates causing a rise in the per unit cost is mentioned at every opportunity.

Transitioning from prototype construction to full-scale production is also a challenge acquisition professionals must be prepared to meet. The realization that the use of a low-rate initial production phase does not always reduce program uncertainties when part of an acquisition strategy is driven home by case study reviews. Ultimately, understanding acquisition principles and programmatic challenges provides a framework in which changes in acquisition regulations and new environmental requirements can be placed.

### **World-Class Customers**

The military can no longer afford to maintain a separate defense industrial base regulated by more than 30,000 military specifications and standards. The fast-paced cycle of technological change is also forcing the military to use commercially developed systems.

Defense Secretary William J. Perry mandated the use of commercial specifications, such as the ubiquitous ISO-9000 standard, for new acquisition programs. He also encouraged the purchase of commercial off-the-

shelf systems, where appropriate. Secretary Perry's goal is to make the Defense Department a world-class consumer.

Many students do not understand the commercial ISO-9000 standards program. Since its importance will grow as commercial specifications replace military standards, classes are made aware of ISO-9000's broad provisions. The College is adjusting its course curriculum to pay additional attention to commercial standards and off-the shelf procurement.

Besides attempting to become world-class customers, the Pentagon's acquisition workforce is becoming more aware of environmental protection issues. The growing importance of environmental regulations is evidenced by a substantial chunk of one day's instruction being devoted to the topic.

Not understanding environmental laws can have dire consequences for program management. Students discuss their own horror stories of having to deal with conflicting environmental laws, regulations, and the advice of superiors and legal counsel. The growing number and complexity of laws covering manufacturing, handling and disposal of toxic materials presents a challenge to the acquisition corps. Program managers can be held personally liable for violations of environmental regulations.

Gaining an understanding of commercial standards and environmental regulations are just two examples of how DSMC courses teach students and help change their attitudes. As we enter an era of intense acquisition reform and streamlining, cooperation between government acquisition personnel and industry representatives will take on added emphasis. In this area, the College is at the forefront, daily teaching students to better understand the acquisition, development and manufacturing processes as seen from each other's perspective.