

# Meeting the Challenge... Fulfilling the Promise

## PMC to APMC — a 30-Year Odyssey

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**T**he genesis of the Defense Systems Management College (DSMC) derived from the wisdom of one remarkable man, The Honorable David S. Packard, Deputy Secretary of Defense during the period 1969-1971. Like many of his predecessors, he was convinced that the management of our development and procurement programs was inadequate to the task. He was determined to enhance management capabilities through the education and training of Program Managers. Given the cost, schedule, and performance problems major programs were encountering, and the apparent inability of Program Managers to overcome them, the challenge was great.

### Meeting the Challenge...

He knew that a Program Manager could not predict nor control the actions major stakeholders in the acquisition process might take that would directly impact the program. He knew that the acquisition system was ponderous, cumbersome, convoluted, bureaucratic, and highly resistant to change. He chose not to fight that battle. His decision to strive for improvement of the process through educating and training program managers reflected his acceptance of reality while instituting change that held promise of success.

### PMC Reviewed, Relocated, Revamped, Renamed

Secretary Packard directed an intensive review of the 10-week Program Management Course (PMC) conducted by

the Defense Weapon Systems Management Center (DWSMC) at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base. The review was completed, and Secretary Packard approved its three major recommendations in September 1970:

- Transfer oversight of DWSMC from the Air Force to the Director of Defense Research and Engineering .
- Move the school to Fort Belvoir, Va.
- Establish a general/flag officer rank Commandant with appropriate authority and responsibility.

With characteristic vigor, Secretary Packard, in November 1970 established a Curricula Committee chaired by Dr. J. Ronald Fox, then Assistant Secretary of the Army (Installations and Logistics) to develop a new curriculum for the school and have it ready for presentation to the first class on Aug. 3, 1971. The committee, assisted by a contractor, developed a 20-week course following the life cycle of a major defense system. The course required each student— through individual participation and in small groups —to demonstrate ability to identify problems, define alternatives, conduct analysis, select a course of action, and defend it. The problems were those that they could be expected to encounter in the “real world.”

The course was ready for delivery on the date promised. It was not, however, truly case-based. Faculty unfamiliarity with teaching using the case method resulted in a good initial course, but one that in-

cluded fewer case studies than the course specifications called for.

In January 1971, Secretary Packard directed that upon completion of the move to Fort Belvoir on July 1, 1971, DWSMC be redesignated the Defense Systems Management School (DSMS). The new school presented the new course to the first class in the new facility on Aug. 3, 1971. Appropriately, Secretary Packard delivered the opening remarks. They were couched in terms of cautious optimism. He hoped that the new school would make:

“...A substantial improvement in the capability and effectiveness of managers for the important development and production programs of the Department of Defense.”

His experience and pragmatism required that he express a major concern.

“...I note that you propose to use the case system. I approve, but I want to give you a note of caution. You are going to have a hard time finding many cases of good management from the experiences of the past decade in the Defense Department. You can find many examples of how not to do it, but you will have to plow some new ground if you are to lead the way toward doing the job the way it should be done.”

His vision and guidance went well beyond those words. He was determined that the DSMS would be a practical

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school for practitioners where the learners would practice how to get things done — *right*. He knew that only quality faculty and quality students could accomplish this. By quality students he meant students committed to a career in program management.

It was his intent to empower the Commandant to select the faculty and establish and ensure high standards for student admission. This intent was only partially realized; the student selection process was, and is, the responsibility of the Services. Many students were committed to a career in program management; many were not. Some students had zero years of acquisition experience; some in the same classroom had 30 years of acquisition experience. Some students were junior in rank, e.g., GS-13/O-3; other students in the same classroom were senior in rank, e.g., SES/O-6. Learning could not be optimized across such a broad spectrum of motivation, experience, and seniority.

Because he was a realist, he accepted the artificial, non-educationally derived constraint on the length of the Program Management Course — 20 weeks — to avoid the costs associated with a permanent change of station for military members.

In 1993, the 20-week course was truncated to a 14-week course and renamed the Advanced Program Management Course (APMC). However, the performance outcomes included in the 20-week course remained essentially the same for the 14-week course. One result was increased “seat-time” in the classroom, less time for student interaction, virtually no time for reflection, and no time for individual student research beyond what was included during classroom activity.

### **Fulfilling the Promise...**

The College has been successful in meeting the challenge and fulfilling the promise — but not always and not in all ways. Since the inception of the first 20-week course, 16,200 learners have grad-

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The Honorable David S. Packard  
Deputy Secretary of Defense  
1969-1971.

uated from the Program Management Course or its successor, the 14-week Advanced Program Management Course. There can be no real doubt that the infusion of these trained professional practitioners into the acquisition workforce has contributed in significant ways to the overall improvement of the performance of the workforce. The fact that our weapon systems are in demand by our allies as well as our potential adversaries speaks to the effectiveness of our acquisition process, the personnel within it, and our defense industry.

Secretary Packard's conviction that enhancing the practical training of Program Managers was essential to the success of a major program was certainly correct. The College has been successful in fulfilling the promise to provide skilled Program Manager practitioners. However, Secretary Packard's observation that putting better managers in charge of programs was essential — but insufficient to the task of improving performance of those programs — is as valid today as it was 30 years ago. He spoke of the “system” — the attitudes, practices, and incentives that evolved and were condoned that did not permit success no matter how skilled the managers might be.

Dr. W. Edwards Deming's mantra supports that view. He insisted that good and willing workers could not be successful when the system in which they had to work would not permit success. He could have been describing our past — and unfortunately — our current acquisition system.

During the past 30 years, DSMC has conducted, or has had outside agencies conduct, surveys of thousands of graduates and the supervisors of graduates of PMC and APMC. Without regard to the timeframe involved, the student and supervisor level of satisfaction with the course of instruction and the performance of graduates remains high — 90 percent or higher on a scale of 1 to 100. Similarly, without regard for the timeframe in-

volved, the same systemic problems surface regarding the acquisition system.

- Requirement to change the Planning, Programming, and Budgeting System and financial management systems.
- Comptrollers that can – and do— overturn management decisions to the detriment of ongoing programs.
- Requirement to provide funding stability after sound funding decisions have been taken.
- An acquisition workforce that has been stretched too thin. The philosophy of *Better, Faster, Cheaper* is not as sound in practice as it appears to be in theory.
- Requisite authority and resources to accomplish the task do not accompany the Program Manager's responsibility for initiatives imposed by higher headquarters.
- Requirement to reduce the number of briefings Program Managers are required to give and the necessity to travel to give them, thereby diverting Program Managers' attention from *running* the program to *selling* it.
- Requirement to provide program offices with some benefit from cost-saving measures they implement.
- Requirement to provide authority and resources sufficient to hire and retain skilled employees.

### What Can the College Do?

Given the probability that the system will not be substantially changed, what can the College do? The answer is the same today, as it was when Secretary Packard confronted the same dilemma. Recognize reality and improve the training offered to potential Program Managers to equip them to operate effectively in a system not designed for their benefit, but one that despite known shortcomings, has produced weapon systems that are the envy of most nations of the world. That is exactly what DSMC and DAU leadership is doing.

### Government Perspective

Documented interviews with experienced government and defense industry acquisition managers provide remarkable insight into what this training

should include and how it should be conducted. First, some excerpts from interviews with experienced government Program Managers/Program Executive Officers.

“The fundamental problem is that government managers have not been trained to deal with situations they encounter in the acquisition process. They need lessons learned — case studies. If you want to institutionalize acquisition reform, you must capture this in case studies.”

“You don't pass on lessons learned by writing a report or a book of lessons learned and having people read it. You need simulations or case discussions so people can talk about situations, ask questions, test their ideas, and learn about the alternatives available and what does and doesn't work.”

“People in the acquisition business need more practical education and training ... People need training in how to conduct the process and then need to walk through the process several times to understand what works and what does not work.”

“None of us in acquisition have the type of problem-oriented training that we need. People need to have the chance to walk through the kinds of problems we will face when we deal with a contractor. We need to see what seems to work under various sets of conditions and what does not work ... Somebody should wake up and ask: What would happen if you sent your fighter pilots to battle with 14 weeks' training?”

### Industry Perspective

Next, some excerpts from interviews with experienced defense industry managers.

“If I were training Program Managers, I would write out a description of all the major problems that confront Program Managers. Then I would conduct managed discussions of programs that encounter these problems, and I would get them to discuss how people can deal with these problems.”

“The Defense Department needs a more formal 'lessons learned' process, which should then be part of mandatory training and retraining of acquisition personnel.”

“Government Program Managers need to have worked through business simulations and case studies as we in business do repeatedly.”

On Jan. 23 of this year, Navy Admiral Dennis C. Blair, U.S. Commander in Chief - Pacific, in a speech at the Armed Forces Communications and Electronics Association — West (AFCEA WEST 2001), at the San Diego Convention Center expressed a view that provides further, more recent support for our course content approach:

“I am convinced that if we drive our acquisition by *real* problems that we face today, and create ways to adapt rapidly to challenges on the horizon, we will not only increase current readiness, we will solve tomorrow's problems better than trying to predict them and build distant technical solutions.”

### New APMC on the Horizon

Recognizing the wisdom of these experienced acquisition practitioners, DSMC is developing a totally new Advanced Program Manager's Course, which will replace the current 14-week Advanced Program Management Course. What is really new that holds promise for enhancing the performance of future Program Managers and hence their programs, is the content of the course, the source of the content, the method of course content delivery, the selection of the faculty, and the selection of the learners.

The course development team has reviewed results of past surveys and interviews and has conducted scores of interviews with Program Managers and Program Executive Officers and will conduct many more to ensure that the dilemmas encountered by the field form the basis for the case studies upon which the course will depend.

- The content of the course will be focused on problems, challenges, and

dilemmas that have confronted Program Management Offices and Program Executive Offices or can be expected to confront them.

- The source of these dilemmas has been and will continue to be the result of extensive visits to, and interviews with program personnel during which they identify the dilemma(s) they have personally encountered.
- The method of course content delivery will be primarily the case study. Each case study will be designed and developed around a dilemma generated by the field, e.g., the Program Management Office. The cases will emulate reality as perceived by the people who actually successfully or unsuccessfully coped with the issue.
- The selection of the "Core Faculty" has been completed. Each faculty member was specially selected based on a proven track record of outstanding performance as a professor at DSMC; a volunteer; willingness to undertake

the rigorous task of new course development; and successful completion of hands-on training in case design, development, and presentation.

- Learners will be especially selected from the individual Services, based on their demonstrated outstanding performance and their potential as candidates for senior program management assignments. They must be GS-14/0-5 and above and be Level III-certified in the Program Management Career Field.

Given the continued dedication, determination, and support of DSMC and DAU leadership; and the energy, experience, and knowledge of the course development team; there now exists an opportunity that "Fulfilling the Promise" is more than a promise.

**Editor's Note:** Hirsch welcomes questions or comments on this article. Contact him at [Ed.Hirsch@dau.mil](mailto:Ed.Hirsch@dau.mil).

## IMPORTANT NOTICE!

The 2001 Acquisition Research Symposium (ARS), originally scheduled for June 18-20, 2001, in Rockville, Md., has been postponed so that major policy changes in the new administration can be addressed. We will be updating the DAU Home Page ([www.dau.mil](http://www.dau.mil)) as information becomes available.

## WEB-ENABLED COURSES FOR DEFENSE INDUSTRY STUDENTS

In fiscal 2000, the Defense Acquisition University (DAU) developed a plan to offer all Web-enabled (online) courses to students who work for corporations in the Defense Industry. The program began at the start of the new fiscal year in October 2000.

A nominal tuition fee will be charged to students for the online courses. This key feature of the program should encourage defense industry students to enroll in the courses, thereby building upon and enhancing the skills of the Defense Industry professional acquisition workforce. Students will find application for enrollment very easy, since the program

will use the same online application form that is currently used by industry students who apply for DAU resident courses — available at:

[http://www.dsmc.dsmc.mil/registrar/industry\\_applic.htm](http://www.dsmc.dsmc.mil/registrar/industry_applic.htm)

The following courses are available to industry students online:

- Fundamentals of Systems Acquisition Management (ACQ 101)
- Fundamentals of Earned Value Management (BCF 102)
- Basic Information Systems Acquisition (IRM 101)

- Basic Software Acquisition Management (SAM 201)
- Acquisition Business Management (BCF 211)
- Simplified Acquisition Procedures (CON 237)
- Acquisition Logistics Fundamentals (LOG 101)
- Introduction to Acquisition Workforce Test and Evaluation (TST 101)

DAU has put together a high-quality program, and the University is confident the program not only has long-term growth potential, but will also be of great benefit to the Defense Industry as well as the students.

For more information, contact Art McCormick, Registrar for Industry Students:

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