



Defense Acquisition University

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PMT 401 The Program Manager's Course

DEDICATED TO SUPPORTING THE WARFIGHTER



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The Program Manager's Course-PMT 401

A 10-week in-residence course for acquisition practitioners specially selected for their potential to lead major acquisition programs, integrated product teams, and major command divisions/departments.

Train as You Fight

The proven doctrine of "train as you fight" is as applicable to acquisition practitioners as it is to all other warfighters. By repeatedly practicing their enhanced analytical critical thinking and decision-making skills, students deepen their understanding of acquisition principles and practices. They do this by analyzing acquisition case studies representing real-world, commonplace acquisition program challenges and dilemmas encountered by program managers in the field. The construct of the course provides participants the opportunity to practice on a daily basis their acquisition leadership and managerial skills in coping with these challenges and dilemmas.

A Demanding Course that Relies on a Three-step Learning Process ...

- Individual study and preparation per case (1–2 hours)
- Active participation in small group discussion (6–8 students/25 minutes per case)
- Active participation in large group discussion (24–28 students/80 minutes per case)

To Enable Students to Meet Critical Course Objectives

- Recognize acquisition challenges and dilemmas more quickly and apply critical thinking skills to develop alternatives, reach sound solutions, and formulate plans of action.
- Lead and integrate functional and multifunctional teams to address the varied and complex problems that confront acquisition leaders.
- Apply best business practices to achieve successful acquisition outcomes, including effective relationships with industry.

Course Composition

The course is constructed around eight overarching themes composed primarily of real-life case studies of acquisition-related challenges and dilemmas. These provide each learner the opportunity to practice:

- Leading a program in a rapidly changing environment;
- Leading program management operations in different acquisition phases;
- Working effectively with higher headquarters;
- Working effectively with industry;
- Achieving and maintaining excellent customer relations;
- Applying appropriate tools for the evolving information environment;
- Working effectively with external organizations; and
- Leading joint and international programs.

Student Comments

- "Outstanding class. I've recommended it to other PMs."
- "I got more out of this course than any other course I ever attended, either in college or in DAU. A 'must-have' course."
- "Excellent course. Best DAU course I've ever attended. Good model, good execution ... this is real learning."
- "Educational in that it exposes a contractor to the training and thought patterns of the government."
- "The case method provides insight into real cases, real scenarios, and sometimes even real outcomes. This type of learning is not provided in the typical academic environment."
- "PMT 401 has reactivated the stimuli that are required for out-of-the-box applications. This course DOES provide a useful approach to problem-solving."
- "Excellent and productive for supporting the warfighter needs. Thanks for this opportunity."
- "This course was fantastic. The case method is great, and you hit the right mix of workshops and cases."
- "Excellent job of developing critical thinking skills and [teaching] how to use them in daily personal and work life."



The Right Students

The right mix of students in each offering of PMT 401 is critical to the learning experience and the success of the course. The right mix includes experienced, Level III-certified Program Management career field members who have demonstrated the potential to become major program or project managers, program executive officers, or deputy program executive officers; a limited number (approximately 15 percent of each offering) of high-potential Level III acquisition professionals in other career fields, such as Engineering, Contracting, Logistics, and Financial Management, and professionals from industry and allied nations. Students are selected by their Service or agency based on their potential to become major program managers, or leaders of major IPTs or functional divisions/departments. Students must be GS-14/O-5 or higher, with at least 4 years of experience in, or in direct support of, a program office. Industry and allied managers must have similar experience.

Due to the advanced, multifunctional, integrated curricula of PMT 401, Level III certification in one or more career fields is required. Individuals who are not certified at Level III in Program Management are encouraged to complete Level II and III Program Management career field courses (PMT 250 and PMT 352) to increase their chances of being selected for PMT 401 and to enhance their contribution to the course.

Prior to attendance and following completion of the above courses, students should have gained additional experience in challenging acquisition assignments.

The Right Course Content

- Case studies and student learning experiences bring reality into the classroom.
- Each case requires students to study, analyze, and discuss examples of commonplace problems actually encountered in defense program management.
- Most cases are written around a protagonist—program manager, deputy program manager, contractor program manager, or other decision-maker—describing:
 - (1) a challenge or dilemma encountered,
 - (2) the protagonist's analysis of the challenge/dilemma, and
 - (3) the two or more options considered by the protagonist, each of which has positive and negative aspects.
- An elective program enables each participant to customize the course to pursue individual learning needs, such as decision analysis, integrated project management, etc.
- Distinguished guest practitioners, peer and instructor mentoring and coaching, Capitol Hill visits, team projects, leadership simulations, and media training are designed to complement the cases and enrich the course.



The Right Course Construct

The rigor, length, course content, and intensity of the Program Manager's Course place significant demands on the students.

- Twelve-hour days, 5 days each week, supplemented by individual study on weekends is the norm. Students should expect 3 to 6 hours a day of individual preparation outside of class.
- A typical day:
 - 7:30–9 a.m., small group preparation for case studies to be presented that day
 - 9–10:20 a.m., first case study
 - 10:40 a.m.–12 p.m., second case study
 - 12–1:30 p.m., lunch; occasionally with guest speaker
 - 1:30–2:50 p.m., third case study
 - 3–5 p.m., elective, small group or individual study
 - 5–6:30 p.m., dinner
 - 6:30 p.m., small group or individual study
- Full participation in all program activities is expected.
- Students must be released from outside responsibilities during the course.
- One extended weekend break planned during the program.
- The aggregate of all cases will portray the acquisition life cycle with a number of variations reflecting innovative application of evolutionary acquisition and technology insertion to achieve reduced cycle time.
- The cases portray dilemmas from all Services as well as from industry, joint and international programs.



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Award-winning best practice presentations at national learning and development, training, performance measurement, balanced scorecard, strategic planning, and corporate university conferences



"No changes to the acquisition system itself can substitute for good sense, good discipline, alignment of what we buy with what our strategy requires and, above all, good people performing the acquisition function."

Ashton B. Carter
Under Secretary of Defense
for Acquisition, Technology & Logistics