

# DAU South Spearheads Learning Organization Initiative

*Jerry Davis and Keisha Vanleer*



**“We must think differently ... We must transform not only the capabilities at our disposal, but also the way we think, the way we train. ... There will be no moment at which the Department is ‘transformed.’ Rather, we are building a culture of continual transformation.”**

**Donald H. Rumsfeld**  
**Secretary of Defense**  
**Transformation Planning Guidance, April 2003**

*DoD Photograph*

**H**eeding Secretary Rumsfeld’s call for continual transformation within the Department of Defense, Frank Anderson, Defense Acquisition University (DAU) president, assigned the learning organization prototype initiative to DAU South Region (DAU-S). The task was to facilitate an overarching learning strategy that promotes career-long learning and provides members of the workforce more control over their learning solutions. The initiative will be accomplished using the framework established by the seven goals of Michael Wynne, acting undersecretary of defense for acquisition, technology and logistics (USD AT&L).

Jim McCullough, dean DAU-S, quickly mobilized a team of faculty and staff to bring the prototype to life and assigned Jerry Davis, associate dean for outreach and performance support, to lead the effort. Within six months of the pro-

*Davis is the associate dean for outreach and performance support, DAU, South Region. Previous positions include Director, Center for Strategy Analysis at the University of Texas, and experience as department head or professor at five universities. Vanleer is the outreach and performance support coordinator at DAU South with extensive experience in new initiative development.*

ject start, the six major acquisition commands in Huntsville, Ala., had signed a memorandum of agreement with DAU forming the Huntsville Acquisition Learning Organization—HALO. Concurrently, another south region satellite team at Eglin Air Force Base, Fla., cooperatively formed the Eglin/DAU Cooperative Learning Organization (ELO).

## **What is a Learning Organization?**

In his book *The Fifth Discipline: The Art & Practice of the Learning Organization*, Peter M. Senge says a learning organization is “any organization in which you cannot *not* learn because learning is so insinuated into the fabric of life.”

To understand the challenges in forming a learning organization with several independent and separate commands, one has first to understand the concept of learning organizations. Davis, lead facilitator of the prototype learning organization, relied on Senge’s book.

The goal of a learning organization is to make learning part of the everyday office environment. A successful learning organization focuses on five goals:

**The goal of a learning organization is to make learning part of the everyday office environment.**



Jim McCullough, dean of DAU-S (left), signs the memorandum of agreement with Paul Bogosian, deputy program executive officer Aviation, and Maxine Maples Kilgore, director, Acquisition Support Center, Southern and Western Regions, establishing the Huntsville Acquisition Learning Organization. Additional Huntsville acquisition commands signed in a separate ceremony.

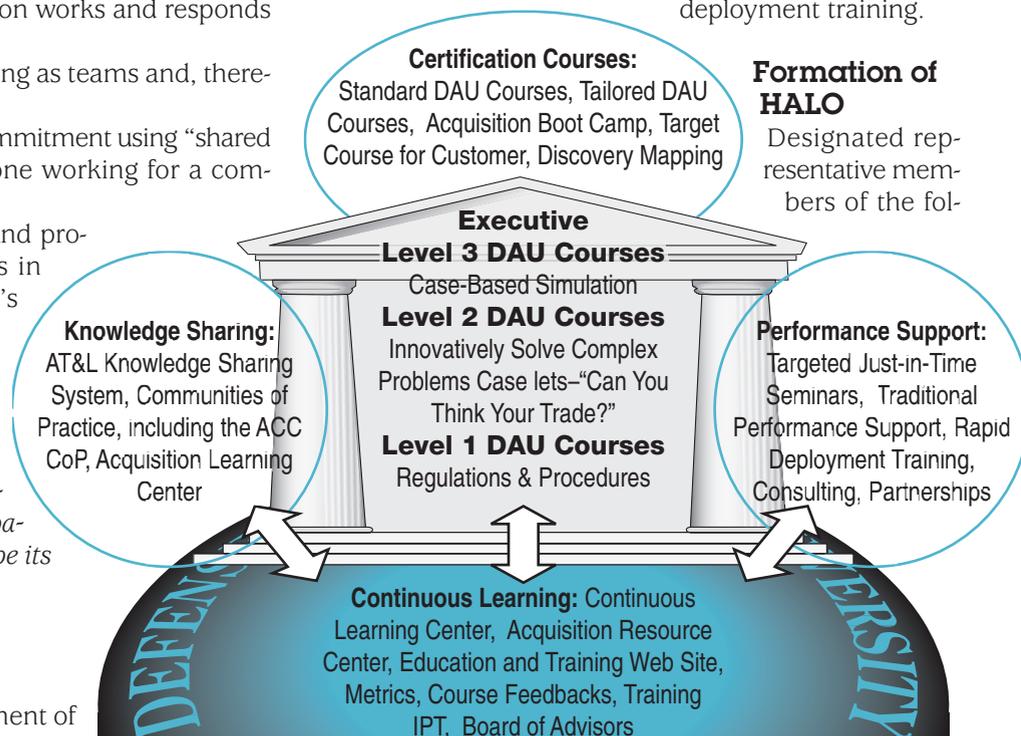
- **Systems Thinking**—Integrating all the functions in an organization into a cohesive structure.
- **Mental Modes**—Internalized frameworks and generalizations of how an organization works and responds to its environment.
- **Team Learning**—People working as teams and, therefore, learning as teams.
- **Shared Vision**—Developing commitment using “shared pictures of the future”; everyone working for a common, agreed upon future.
- **Personal Mastery**—Personal and professional development that is in sync with the organization’s goals.

control over their learning solutions through balancing training courses, knowledge sharing, continuous learning, performance support, and rapid deployment training.

The bottom-line definition of a learning organization is that it’s *any organization that has a culture and structure that promotes learning at all levels to enhance its capabilities to produce, adapt, and shape its future.*

**Why Form a Learning Organization?**

USD AT&L Goal 7 is the development of a motivated, agile workforce. An objective of Goal 7 is to facilitate learning organizations by fully deploying an overarching learning strategy—the AT&L Performance Learning Model (PLM). The PLM is a capabilities-based training approach that promotes career-long learning and provides the workforce more



The PLM provides the Huntsville AT&L workforce with a better perspective of their lifelong learning solutions. DAU has transformed its concept of learning to extend beyond the traditional classroom learning model.

**AT&L’s Performance Learning Model (PLM)  
DAU’s Contribution to the Support  
of the Huntsville Community**

**A learning organization is any organization that has a culture and structure that promotes learning at all levels to enhance its capabilities to produce, adapt, and shape its future.**



Jerry Davis, associate dean for outreach and performance support (left), and Keisha Vanleer, DAU-S outreach and performance support coordinator, congratulate Don Barker, deputy program executive officer Tactical Missiles, after the memorandum of agreement signing ceremony in which PEO Tactical Missiles strategically aligned with the Huntsville Acquisition Learning Organization.

lowing formed a working integrated product team (WIPT): the Army Acquisition Support Center; Ground Based Mid-course Defense; Program Executive Office Tactical Missiles; Program Executive Office Aviation; U.S. Army Aviation and Missile Command; Program Executive Office Air, Space and Missile Defense; and U.S. Army Space and Missile Defense. The initial WIPT meeting, facilitated by

HALO may be found at <<http://www.dau.mil/regions/South/halo.asp>> .

**Editor's note:** The authors welcome comments and questions. Davis can be contacted at [jerry.davis@dau.mil](mailto:jerry.davis@dau.mil) and Vanleer at [keisha.vanleer@dau.mil](mailto:keisha.vanleer@dau.mil).

DAU-S in September 2003, approved the prototype concept of a learning organization and pledged support. Follow-on meetings resulted in the development of the HALO goals and objectives and a memorandum of agreement.

### **Formation of Eglin Learning Organization**

October 2003 marked the official opening of the DAU South satellite campus at Eglin Air Force Base. Jack Dwyer, site manger, immediately began work on forming a learning organization. The learning organization initiative was facilitated by DAU's close ties to the newly formed Air Armament Academy at the Air Armament Center (AAC). The evolution of the Eglin learning organization (ELO) is described in the companion article on page 26 in "A Learning Transformation: The Eglin Learning Organization."

### **Path Ahead for Learning Organizations**

The formation of HALO and ELO is just the beginning of the exciting initiatives. Future activities include sharing lessons learned, collaborating as subject matter experts, participating in rotational assignments, and a regional learning organization conference. Additional information on