

A Different Kind of Force Development

The Educational Partnership of Warner Robins Air Logistics Center, Macon State College, the Defense Acquisition University, and the Aerospace Industry Committee



From left to right are Lisa Corr, Christine Clark, Debbie Johnson, Mickie Cranford, and Deborah Hall. Photos by Gary Cutrell, Robins AFB

The acquisition career workforce is constantly changing. The pace is increased, resources have been reduced, and the use of electronic acquisitions is developing a global acquisition workforce. The Department of Defense must ensure tomorrow's acquisition professionals are ready for the challenges to come. Warner Robins Air Logistics Center is preparing for its acquisition future through the recent development of an innovative educational partnership with Macon State College (MSC), the Defense Acquisition University (DAU), and the Aerospace Industry Committee of the Warner Robins Chamber of Commerce. The partnership initiative, conceived by Warner Robins ALC Director of Contracting Patsy Reeves, shifts educational responsibility for contracting fundamentals from after hiring to before hiring. The partnership has been a win-win for multiple stakeholders by creating a potential recruiting pipeline to accelerate contracting workforce development

for individuals pursuing a career in the federal sector. In addition, the partnership offers individuals in the private sector the opportunity to learn about the intricacies of government contracting. The impetus for developing the partnership focused on DoD's need to prepare and deliver ready-to-work contracting employees.

So, how'd they do it? In March 2008, *Defense AT&L* talked with the team members that developed and implemented the educational partnership. Those interviewed were:

- Mickie Cranford, chief, ALC C-130 Contracting Division and MSC adjunct instructor
- Christine Clark, chief, Policy and Review Branch, Contracting Directorate, ALC
- Deborah Hall, chief, Force Development and Analysis Branch, ALC
- Debbie Johnson, DAU site manager, Warner Robins

- Lisa Corr, source selection advisor, Pricing, Plans, and Programs Office, ALC
- John Cole, interim dean, School of Business, MSC
- Tim Callahan, chairman, Aerospace Industry Committee of the Warner Robins Area Chamber of Commerce

Note: Partnership team member and ALC price analyst Dick Arrington was not available for this interview.

Q

Ms. Hall, what drove you to start thinking about partnering with Macon State?

Hall

With the contracting career field Baby Boomer generation closing in on retirement in the next five to 10 years, coupled with today's contracting environment, which is very different from the past, it is imperative to deliver ready-to-work employees to the contracting career field. We realized that we must compress the five to seven years that used to be required to develop a warranted contracting officer. The idea was to partner with a local college to develop a contracting curriculum that offered college

in future federal employment, so the courses were developed to be of interest to both public and private industry. An added benefit was the estimated government training cost avoidance of \$14,000 per student.

Q

Ms. Hall, what were some of the first steps you took when developing the educational partnership? Can you describe some of the roles that needed to be assumed and the discussions that were held that made this partnership a reality?

Hall

The initial partnership meeting took place in late December 2006 between Patsy Reeves and Barbara Frizzell, vice president of academic affairs at MSC. The two leaders discussed the contracting curriculum concept and committed their support to ensure the success of the partnership. With the support of Maj. Gen. Thomas J. Owen, Warner Robins ALC commander; David A. Bell, president of MSC; Frank Anderson, DAU president; and Tim Callahan, chairman, Aerospace Industry Committee of the Warner Robins Area Chamber of Commerce, a small team of Robins and MSC experts turned the educational partnership concept into reality.

For a successful partnership, we had to get the right people with the subject matter expertise on the partnership team. After meeting with Mrs. Reeves and the MSC faculty and administrators, the next step was to contact our DAU site manager, Debbie Johnson. Ms. Johnson was asked to be a core part of our educational partnership team—it was critical to put a team together to develop contracting courses with subject matter experts to help turn the partnership into a reality. The Robins team expanded to include the expertise of ALC Contract Policy



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—Deborah Hall

undergraduate students fundamental contracting courses to prepare them as potential employees and bring them on board as ready-to-work employees. We didn't want to limit the contracting curriculum to individuals interested

Chief Christine Clark, along with Dick Arrington, a veteran price analyst. This team began comparing, reviewing, and cross-referencing MSC business courses with DAU contracting courses to identify duplications, omissions, etc.,

to create pure contracting courses. As this work evolved, two additional ALC subject matter experts completed the Robins core team: Mickie Cranford, C-130 contracting division chief; and Lisa Corr, source selection advisor for pricing, plans, and programs. The team began reviewing MSC's existing undergraduate business curriculum and DAU courses, and they collectively developed course objectives and outlines. Those individuals developed the three contracting courses—Principles of Contracting, Con-

development program certification after completing the required on-the-job hours.

As the educational partnership coordinator, I managed the daily activities of the partnership, served as the liaison between all parties, and authored the partnership memorandum of understanding.

Q
Ms. Johnson, can you talk about your role in this partnership?

Johnson

When I first came to Robins in the fall of 2006, Patsy Reeves approached me on ways to position her contracting workforce for the future. After I listened to some of her challenges—attrition, Baby Boomers soon retiring, and the length of time to develop a contracting officer—I introduced the idea of equivalency. By that, I mean a college degree focusing on contracting, equivalent to the DAU course material, thus meeting the DAWIA level I and level II certification requirements, which could provide a



[The academic partnership is] an opportunity to transform how we do business.

—Debbie Johnson



tract Evaluation and Award, and Contract Pricing. The courses are the equivalent of nine semester hours at MSC. Less than 12 months later, the first contracting course, Principles of Contracting, was offered, and 30 students recently completed it.

Three classes offered at MSC are part of a contracting curriculum anticipating the fulfillment of the Defense Acquisition Workforce Improvement Act [DAWIA] certification requirements for a federal government career in contracting. The three contracting electives plus other business prerequisites replace 10 DAU training classes. Students subsequently hired for ALC contracting positions will be eligible for level I and level II acquisition professional

pipeline into the contracting workforce. This would allow new employees to enter the government workforce at a much higher level of contracting knowledge and position them for future acquisition challenges. It's an opportunity to transform how we do business.

Q
Mr. Cole, could you tell us a little bit about the courses that resulted from the educational partnership?

Cole

Essentially, 10 DAU contracting courses plus prerequisites have been turned into three MSC courses that can be taken for college credit. This isn't on-the-job training, and

it's not just continuing education—these are college credit courses developed specifically for this partnership.

Initially, we came up with a sequence of three courses, with plans to offer the first in the spring semester, the second course the following fall, and then the third course the following spring. This matches up with a college junior moving into his or her senior year up to a graduation. We originally had a classroom assigned for 24 seats, and then we had to move to a larger classroom because we

Regarding the educational partnership, the Aerospace Industry Committee's role is primarily to promote and advertise the program and its advantages. Eventually, we can assist in recruiting students for the program. We believe it's a great opportunity to help the base with its workforce challenges. We also view it as a positive initiative for the aerospace industry. The students who go through this program will likely be the government acquisition officials



ended up with 30 students. We announced the program in October [2007] and started in January [of this year]—already with an overflow crowd—and we've accelerated the sequence of courses to accommodate that demand. We'll now offer the second and third courses simultaneously this summer, so we will be a full school year ahead of schedule with our first students completing this curriculum.

Q *Mr. Callahan, could you explain the function of the Chamber of Commerce Aerospace Industry Committee and its present role in this education partnership?*

Callahan

The Warner Robins Aerospace Industry Committee is composed of approximately 100 defense-related companies in the local area. It is a fairly large organization that represents the defense industry in the Warner Robins area and supports the mission of ALC and Robins AFB. We view it as enlightened self-interest to support the base and its multiple initiatives to become more efficient and to increase its contributions to our national security posture. When there are upcoming acquisitions, our members participate in industry days. Monthly luncheons with leaders from ALC give us a snapshot of what's going on in their respective wings or functional areas and what challenges they're facing. This, in turn, assists industry in determining what we can do to help accomplish the mission.

with whom we interface in the future, or perhaps new employees of our own.

Q *Ms. Johnson, as the DAU site manager, what were the challenges you faced in bringing partnership to fruition?*

Johnson

The challenge was meeting the customer's need—the ability to hire college graduates who already had contracting knowledge—within the present Macon State curriculum, which provides for a business and information technology degree with a major in accounting, management, marketing, or general business. We immediately realized only the major tracks of management, marketing, or general business would allow for a concentration in contracting. The team reviewed the present MSC courses and the DAWIA training to see how both sets of curriculum might be combined as a package to meet the DAWIA requirements. After the review, the team was able to leverage off of the

present MSC curriculum in pursuit of the DAU level I and level II equivalency.

Q *Ms. Clark, Macon State offers three courses that tie in to DoD contracting-related courses. How did the team come to the decision to develop just those three particular courses?*

Clark

At Robins, we've been really strong in training new employees. What we have done locally is look at training from an overall contracting process—from the acquisition planning phase all the way through post-award. Our local training process has been adopted by the AFMC [Air Force Materiel Command]. When we established the three courses, we borrowed the existing process flow training topics from the AFMC training modules. The modules are succinct material that could stand alone so the new employees or the students could have organized lessons. For instance, the Macon State course, Principles of Contracting—it's really about teaching the beginning of our contracting process. Then there's the Contract Evaluation and Award course, and of course, Contract Pricing is a major fundamental concept. So we looked at the course development through an acquisition process flow.

Q *Ms. Cranford, can you talk about how this partnership is different from how the current workforce learns materials,*

and can you discuss how this might impact the efficiency of the contracting workforce?

Cranford

The current workforce learns through numerous training classes and on-the-job training. They have mentors or trainers who show them, "Here's what you do." The current workforce went through a lot of textbook training early in their career. This offers a different opportunity. For each topic, we divided the material into modules, explaining the flow throughout the contracting process. For specific modules, I bring guest speakers into the classroom, allowing the students an opportunity to ask those individuals job-specific questions. These students didn't know what a contract was—we're starting from the very basics. They're tying the concepts together and they're tying together the materials we're presenting with what they'll be applying later in the workforce setting, whether it's government or industry.

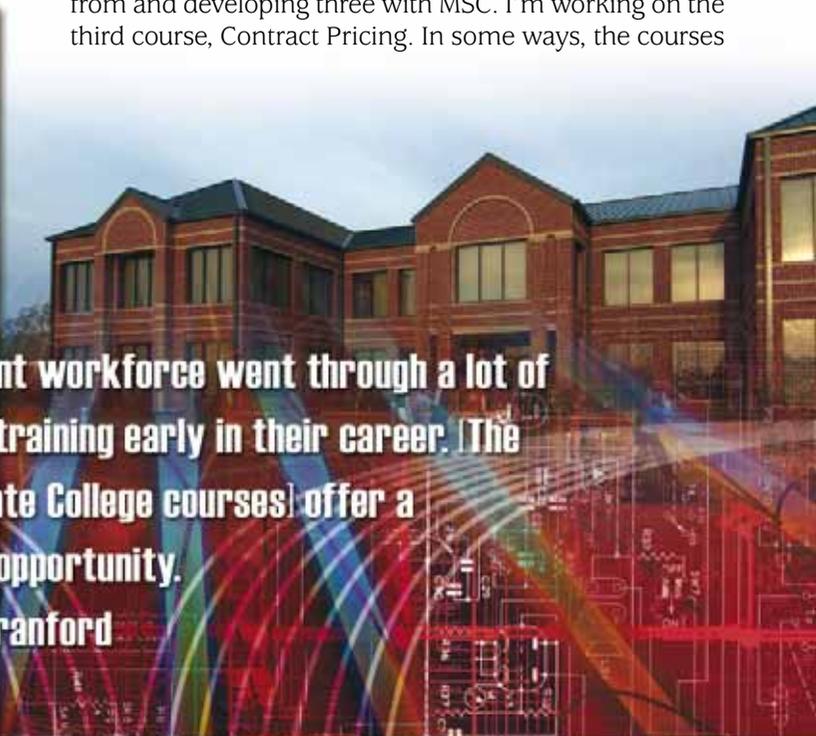
Q *Ms. Corr, there has been great emphasis on the need to make sure DoD has the right pricing skills and competencies in the defense acquisition workforce. As the person responsible for the pricing curriculum and content, can you share with us some of the things that you've been doing and the content of the courses?*

Corr

We are working with DAU on developing these courses—there are 10 DAU courses that we're pulling information from and developing three with MSC. I'm working on the third course, Contract Pricing. In some ways, the courses



The current workforce went through a lot of textbook training early in their career. [The Macon State College courses] offer a different opportunity.
—Mickie Cranford



overlap slightly—the previous courses will touch on pricing, but the Contract Pricing course is more in-depth on the cost analysis, price analysis, and negotiations. We are planning to do a mock negotiation toward the end of the semester. This will make the course more practical and exciting for the students.

Q *What are some of the lessons learned that you would pass on to other teams or other acquisition organizations who are in the process of doing this or may be contemplating doing this in the future?*

Clark

I think structure is important. We were fortunate to have Ms. Johnson, our local DAU expert, offer us insight into how we should look at the DAU objective and DAU materials. We had to go through the steps of how we would document the material so that from the development, we could move to equivalency and then move to the individual instructors actually taking the instruction plans and using them effectively. To facilitate this, we came up with three key documents for each course—a crosswalk matrix, an instruction plan per module, and a module summary. I think this structure led to our being able to make sure that the courses can be changed and updated in an organized manner.

Cranford

One of the other things we're doing to enhance development of trainees' contracting development—and it's proven to be successful—is we've gone to experts on different modules such as small business, risk assessment, or market research. This evening, we have a guest speaker from our small business office. He'll talk about socio-economic programs. It helps the students when they hear from someone who works in the field instead of hearing everything from me. It helps break up the material and provides a different perspective. The guest speaking segments will be flexible each time we offer the course. We ask several people to participate, so the guest speakers will change from class to class. I wasn't sure how successful this would be when I first started. After all, you're asking someone to come on his or her own time, often after hours and following a long day. Everyone has been excited, and everyone wants to share what he or she does. It's been a huge success, and I would recommend a similar program for others.

Q *Ms. Cranford, I understand you are serving as an adjunct professor for these courses. Could you talk about that role?*

Cranford

My role as the adjunct professor for the first contracting course, Principles of Contracting, kind of evolved. When

we first started, and I heard about the idea that we were going to offer contracting courses at Macon State in conjunction with the DAU, it was quite an exciting opportunity to say, "We're going to be able to take coursework we provide to our contracting workforce into the classroom setting for a new generation of potential employees." So when the call for volunteers came out, I put my name in the hat. As a division chief in contracting, I've had co-ops [cooperative education employees] and other trainees, and for them to get this kind of foundation is just amazing. It provides so much to the student and our workforce.

My role now—developing the curriculum and serving as an adjunct professor—allows me the opportunity to share Air Force contracting with the students. We've utilized DAU material and AFMC material. However, the courses are not just about academic-type presentations. I've tried to share personal stories or things I've gained from other team members or co-workers. For example, when discussing contract types, I share examples about specific acquisitions. I relate how we apply the course material in the real world. So it's been exciting to be able to share those kinds of stories with the students. We want them to know that it's not all paperwork. The students tell you that when they go into contracting, they want to make a difference.

Q *In addition to those seeking a career in the federal government, there are also students in class from industry or the private sector very interested in learning the things taught in these classes. Can you discuss that?*

Cranford

We have students from industry. We also have students in the class who are not in contracting, but they work for Robins AFB in other disciplines such as program management. This class is helping them understand a huge piece of the puzzle in their total acquisition. They are engaged in class. They'll come in before or after class because they have a real-world question such as, "Here's what we've done. Now what does that mean?" So we walk them through that. We have some class participants who are currently working in industry. Others, as a result of this class, are marketable here at Robins AFB and also with industry throughout the country. They are gaining skills that they'll be able to use throughout their career.

Q *Mr. Cole, who are the students who have been attracted to this program?*

Cole

The program is geared for an existing business student at MSC who wants to pursue contracting as an additional concentration. This first group of students of about 30 includes current Air Force employees, current MSC students,

and also a number who weren't in college before we announced the contracting concentration. Several heard about these courses by word of mouth, on the news, or by way of a press release; and they are now enrolled as non-degree-seeking students. The students are essentially a mix of young, older and more experienced, and brand-new students.

Q *Are there any standards for students to actually be hired into a position once they've been through the curriculum, or even to come into the curriculum? Also, what are the benefits for students to have attended these three classes?*

Hall

Eligibility requirements for individuals pursuing a contracting position are in accordance with Office of Personnel Management standards for entry level (GS-07) positions and DoD qualification standards for GS-1102 contracting positions. This means applicants must have a bachelor's degree with 24 business semester hours in any combination of accounting, business finance, law, contracts, purchasing, economics, industrial management, marketing, quantitative methods, or organization and management; and they must also have a 3.0 grade point average. These are the minimum requirements.

There are many benefits to this partnership, resulting in a win-win for multiple parties. If a student successfully completes the three contracting courses and is selected for employment, he or she may be eligible for an accelerated in-hire pay rate, which is about \$7,600 more than those who hire in at the usual entry level in-hire pay rate. The Air Force can save time and money because the students completing the courses gain a fundamental understanding of government contracting and report ready to work, saving the usual 12 weeks of new employee classroom and online training.

Cranford

Another benefit is to those individuals who will enter the Robins AFB workforce as trainees and co-ops. These individuals go before career boards during their training period. A co-op or a trainee will sit in front of a board of four to five senior contracting division chiefs—I sit on several of the boards—and we ask technical questions to determine if they are receiving the needed training and experience. When I'm teaching, part of the advantage to the student is when they hear, "This is important—this piece of information is the type of information that you'll be asked on a career board. It's not just data you're going to memorize and dump and never use again. These are concepts you'll use your entire career."

Q *What challenges do you see for this type of program as it continues in the future?*

Cole

I think the number one factor will be attracting the right kind of and enough students in that first sequence of courses—students who see contracting as a desirable end state and who will progress through all three courses. In the first course, students can come in and shop perhaps, but with the right instructor in place and the right motivations on the part of the students, they'll get through the first course and see their way through the second and third courses.

How do we measure that? By determining how many of our graduates out of that program are working in contracting, either on the base or in the contracting community, three, four, or five years from now.

Q *Do you see this model here as being easily replicated in other communities? What are those things that have been essential to success?*

Johnson

I think it's easily replicated—colleges and universities can develop their own curricula that can be certified equivalent to the DAU curriculum and can be used to meet the requirements of DAWIA. Success here at Robins, no doubt, is attributed to the strong senior leadership of Mrs. Reeves. Her exuberance, vision, and passion for workforce development exceed all others. This passion is embraced by her workforce as well, which was evident amongst all the team members. Her workforce vision enlisted MSC and Aerospace Industry Committee to form this tremendous partnership. Working with this highly motivated and passionate team was an extreme honor and pleasure.

Hall

The success of this endeavor all goes back to the incredible support that we experienced from each of the educational partnership senior leaders—Maj. Gen. Owen, Dr. Bell, Mr. Anderson, Mr. Callahan, and every team member—all stakeholders were committed to the success of this project. Mrs. Reeves was the champion for this endeavor, and she was very much involved collaborating with Dr. Frizzell.

In addition to the strong senior center leadership, industry embraced this endeavor. Led by the Aerospace Industry Committee, they marketed the educational partnership and the college courses. Several Aerospace Industry Committee members audited the Principles of Contracting course and provided recommendations from an industry perspective. This project was a Herculean effort that was created and implemented in a short period of time, and its legacy will stand the test of time.

Q *Thank you all for your time.*