

Defense Acquisition University Board of Visitors Meeting
DAU West Region, San Diego, CA
January 20, 2016

Welcome: BoV Chairman VADM Dave Venlet, USN, Retired

VADM Venlet welcomed the board members and DAU deans and directors. He thanked Dr. Kevin Carmen, West Region dean for hosting the event. VADM Venlet briefly recapped the discussion at the September meeting related to critical thinking, industry knowledge and risk aversion, and the proposal for VADM Venlet to reach out to the Defense Business Board. He reported back to the Board that he met with the Chairman of the DBB and they both agreed that some further discussion about how they could potentially help each other with the common goal of improving Defense acquisition is warranted. Specifically, the 2014 report on innovation had a fair amount of content related to the Defense Acquisition University. The observation that mixed messages from senior leadership can lead to misalignment of efforts was made by both the DBB and the BoV.

Three West Region customers were invited to the meeting to discuss their perspective on the state of the Defense Acquisition Workforce, leadership, and DAU training.

DAU Update: DAU President Mr. Jim Woolsey

Mr. Woolsey welcomed the Board members to the West Region's main campus in San Diego. He stated that during the meeting, they would be briefed on what DAU is doing to improve the relationship with industry and they would hear directly from several local customers.

Mr. Woolsey explained that one of the advantages of having a regional construct is that DAU is able to be close to its customers across the nation. One of the major responsibilities of the regional deans is to cultivate the relationships with the major acquisition commands in their region so that DAU can be responsive to their needs. It also allows them better opportunities for direct feedback. A board member asked if DAU was able to get feedback from the end customer—not just the members of the acquisition community. So far, there is no formalized process to get feedback from the user community.

Mr. Woolsey shared the budget outlook and constraints that will affect the university during the next two fiscal years. The size of the faculty and staff have been shrinking in proportion with the course demand. There are more budget reductions for FY16 and FY17, as well as the mandated Major Headquarters Activity reductions. DAU will also have to cut contractor support by 10%.

This year's strategic plan is available online and includes what DAU plans to do to be more efficient. Some highlights from the plan include deploying a new website, incorporating critical thinking into more courses, experimenting with new classroom techniques, creating cybersecurity content for Foundational, Workflow and Performance Learning, and improving the functional interconnectivity across the Acquisition Learning Model (ALM). Workflow Learning is getting a lot of attention right now as it is new and needs the attention and resources to become a successful component of the ALM. This includes a new awards program for outstanding Workflow Learning experiments. DAU has aligned both the strategic plan and the organization to the ALM.

There was some discussion around the term “workflow” as it is used in the ALM. The concern is that some might interpret the focus to be on the process versus the outcome. Traditionally in the Defense community, “process” may allude to a “check block” mentality that DAU is trying to break workforce members away from. However, the connotation of “workflow” in the learning sector implies a process which *is* the outcome. Mr. Woolsey explained the DAU interpretation of workflow learning as including both the tools and the environment for workforce members to get the information they need when they need it. A board member cautioned Mr. Woolsey that this is a big deal and it’s hard to do. Traditional ISDs are not trained to do this. Mr. Woolsey agreed that this is not an easy thing to do and said that DAU has hired a web designer to help build the site.

A board member encouraged Mr. Woolsey to give a lot of thought to how DAU is going to brand and market Workflow Learning. Mr. Woolsey agreed and said that branding and marketing are critical components for critical thinking and understanding industry too.

A board member questioned whether there was a clearly stated challenge in the strategic plan that defines what the university hopes to conquer and what specific efforts are going to happen in order to be successful. The underlying concern is that it could prove very challenging to add work with the known reduction in resources. There was discussion around looking at the different things DAU and the board have identified as problem areas within Defense acquisition and targeting some of the Workflow Learning assets at those areas to see if there is a measurable impact. Mr. Woolsey responded that he has set up a department and dedicated resources to run Workflow Learning. The overarching problem statement we hope to resolve is that in Defense acquisition, things take too long and cost too much. That is the bigger problem DAU wants to help solve.

There was a comment from a board member that the reports from the Department indicate that there have been improvements over the last six years and things are going great. Mr. Woolsey responded that unfortunately in Defense acquisition training, it is very difficult to draw a definitive line of correlation between training and acquisition outcomes. Yes, there is data to show that contract growth in the last five years has been less than it was before. But there are also stories out there about ill-advised things DoD is doing in acquisition and the unintended consequences.

Everyone agrees that critical thinking and understanding industry are problems and that cybersecurity is an issue. In the learning world, two things are true: people forget much of what they learn in class not long after they leave the class, and the new generation depends on being able to learn what they need to know when they need to know it—and thus, the emphasis on Workflow Learning. DAU really made an effort to decide to put resources to that problem area.

A board member observed that OUSD(AT&L) indicates there is evidence that contracts are coming down—which sounds like a defense of the Better Buying Power initiatives. But the world outside the Department of Defense doesn’t see the evidence in the same way. Another board member advised that DAU needs to teach ground truth, not initiatives.

Katrina McFarland has been detailed to ASA(ALT) and Darlene Costello will fill the role of ASD(A). DAU bids farewell to Foundational Learning Director Tim Shannon next month after 28 years with the university.

West Region Customer Discussion: DAU West Region Dean Dr. Kevin Carman

Dr. Carman introduced the West Region customers and gave a very brief description of their organizations. The customers were asked to address three main topics: the state of the workforce, the state of acquisition leadership, and challenges for DAU. They characterized the workforce in the following ways.

State of the Workforce

Personnel reductions in acquisition organizations lead to increased pressures.

More specific requirements and more data reporting is being mandated with fewer workforce members to respond. Tremendous gaps exist in the competencies of the workforce.

The experienced workforce must be retrained when new initiatives and policies are released.

As organizations lose people, the remaining workforce needs a wider variety of skills; tools become even more important.

Training needs: how to do continuous product improvement; more specific training versus generic; system of systems focus as future programs will be linked and they will be difficult to integrate; a tool that enables program managers to more smartly engage with industry; core training where students learn how to work with the other career fields effectively; key leadership development; generalist training for flag/SES

The workforce also needs tools to write compelling best value analysis.

Suggestion: make financial people DAWIA-level certified so they understand the relationship with industry as well.

Challenge: because of personnel reductions on the appropriated side, some organizations end up leveraging more and more resources from the Federally Funded Research and Development Centers (FFRDC) and Working Capital Fund reimbursable side, and those people do not always understand the bigger picture of acquisition.

State of Acquisition Leadership

“Fail early and often” isn’t being led from the top.

Too much scrutiny into all the details—program managers and program executive officers are not able to do their job without constantly being questioned.

Rapid acquisition processes have been treated as suspect and have not been mainstreamed.

Agile development has been very successful in limited communities. In others, it consistently fails because the DoD system is requirements-oriented and therefore is not set up for agile development to be successful.

The more time the acquisition community spends on bureaucracy, the more the warfighter suffers from not getting a usable capability when they need it.

No good acquisition career path in the Air Force for military workforce (with the exception of Contracting).

There are many program managers in the workforce who qualified many years ago; they need to be re-trained.

Cause for turmoil: the government forces contractors to be optimistic and to buy-in. Most of the prime contractors are integrators, but do not effectively control their subcontractors. Government and industry both enter into the “conspiracy of hope.”

Lengthy processes which are not value-added are wasteful.

An area of misalignment is risk. Senior leaders are saying take more risk, but everything in the acquisition system is designed to reduce risk.

Challenges for DAU

A lot of issues in programs result from the government and industry players not seeing the end result the same way.

DoD should consider using commercial certifications for the basic-level training and have DAU focus on the post-doctoral, high-end kind of training. However, another customer commented that while there is commercial training available, they have not found one that meets their needs; DAU can do it better and for less cost to his organization.

Should-cost was identified as an area of frustration due to a lack of common understanding about what it is and a lack of over-arching implementation guidance.

Need more help with cybersecurity and minimizing vulnerabilities; more training and a common approach to cyber within DoD.

Value engineering is not stressed in should-cost and not enough people understand it.

The importance of understanding an Integrated Master Schedule--DAU should put more emphasis on teaching students how a schedule works so they can be more flexible, not just plug information into a static tool.

In the IT career field, many workforce members do not have college degrees, so more partnerships to help them achieve their degrees efficiently would be beneficial.

Becoming a Chaosmeister: Performance Learning Director Mr. John Higbee

The acquisition environment isn't all that different today than it has been in the past. There are a lot of organizations operating independently in the same space. There seem to be many similarities between the acquisition environment and an operational, process-driven integrated environment. Therefore, how we operate in it and how we develop our people for it, perhaps should be more similar to the operational approach than an academic one. This would require training the workforce to:

- be experts in their career field,
- be competent team members and understand the other players on the team, and
- understand the environment enough to be more proactive than reactive.

A board member recommended that DAU should champion teaching teams. DAU currently does conduct intact team training. One must also recognize the financial impact because intact team training and advance skills are expensive when compared to foundational learning.

A recurring theme in the discussion is the need for workforce members to have better situational awareness and a more thorough understanding of the acquisition environment they are operating in. DSMC has already piloted a Key Leader Development Program for the Missile Defense Agency that will address many of these topics for workforce members outside of the program management career field. DAU is currently looking at what it can offer workforce members after they have attained their level III certifications.

There is broad agreement that curriculum development and courses should not be entirely stove-piped by functional career field. Having people from different career fields in the classroom together to understand how the different players must work together to be more successful would have a greater impact than role-playing.

A board member suggested considering different approaches to teaching; courses may not always be the best option. In response, Mr. Higbee explained the theory behind the ALM in recognizing that the courses from Foundational Learning are only one part of the larger learning model. The knowledge at

the point of need from Workflow Learning and the tailored approach of Performance Learning all round out how DAU trains the workforce. DAU uses the ALM to illustrate the different approaches and align what the university offers with what the workforce needs.

The warfighter needs to be part of the cost conversation and understand cost while the acquisition team needs to have better insight into what the warfighters' needs are.

A board member commented that it would be very interesting for DAU to understand exactly who their active customers really are. Mr. Higbee stated that gathering that data is an initiative that began in FY15 and the expectation is that it will allow DAU to better understand its market. Currently, DAU relies on the regional deans to maintain the relationship with their customers and understand their needs.

The customers were very enthusiastic about what DAU provides and even perceived DAU as being in a position to resolve problem areas persistent in Defense acquisition. To some degree, this may be true. For example, when an organization was struggling with implementing should-cost, DAU not only sent faculty members to their location to conduct a workshop, but they created a resource that faculty at other regions could also use to engage with their customers.

A board member asked if DAU could be the advocate with regard to policy. Is there a formal process for identifying policy issues and mixed messages for potential resolution? Mr. Woolsey responded that DAU does not have a formal process and that we do not do it often enough. The Performance Learning Directorate is tasked with finding ways to do that.

There appears to be a disconnect between the training wants and needs of those in the field and that of those driving policy in the Pentagon. Is there a way to break down the stove pipes of the career fields to see acquisition more holistically? More interdisciplinary training and development opportunities could help.

The need for interdisciplinary training was stated by the customers and has been discussed and agreed upon by the board. A suggestion is to approach training with something similar to "majors" and "minors" to encourage secondary areas of expertise or emphasis.

The board agreed that DAU has a role in representing the acquisition community to voice concerns such as those previously discussed to Service and OSD leadership.

West Region Overview: Dr. Kevin Carman

Dr. Carman began by explaining the organizational structure of the West Region and its geographical locations. He explained how the departments are organized in relation to the Acquisition Learning Model function. He showed the built-in lines of collaboration between people across the enterprise and emphasized that the regions do not operate in a silo. Curriculum development is an example of this and Dr. Carman stated they have found that the sprint curriculum development model has worked very well. Dr. Carman stated that Performance Learning has increased this year and that a faculty member is assigned to each customer organization. There are also monthly briefings which outline upcoming Mission Assistance opportunities for faculty.

The West Region has seen a rise in the demand for executive coaching. Like other regions, they also support organizations outside of Defense acquisition.

Understanding Industry: Foundational Learning Director Mr. Tim Shannon

Mr. Shannon explained a brief history of the Understanding Industry course, ACQ 315. It was created as a result of recommendations by the Board of Visitors and was not driven by the functional leads. The competencies created for this course are now used for other courses also. The university is currently building a simulation that can be used in this and other courses. The course is primarily targeted to personnel in the program management, contracting, and logistics career fields. The entire course is built around critical thinking skills and is frequently reviewed. Based on feedback metrics, the course has very high job impact ratings. For most DAU courses, this is the lowest rating because in many cases, the students aren't yet doing the work they are being trained for. The requirement for this course is exploding in FY16—we'll probably do around 600 offerings compared to 451 in FY15.

DAU is still exploring ways to improve the workforce's understanding of industry-related topics. ACQ 315 includes a Dragonfly exercise where the students act as the government representative, then they switch sides and act as the industry participant. This allows them to see the situation from both perspectives and gain a better understanding for what motivates industry and impacts their decisions. A board member suggested that an area needing further explanation is the RFP and PWS so students know how those things are received in industry. They also need to understand how industry is going to respond based on what is requested.

A suggestion from another board member was to consider using either live or recorded Wall Street earnings call or get the highlights of them to use in the class.

Industry students are an important part of the executive courses. They are able to share their experiences and offer a different perspective from that of their classmates. Guest speakers are industry executives, our faculty are heavily involved in industry organizations, and DAU is hiring more faculty with industry experience. DAU sends faculty to industry courses, and some faculty have even taught blocks of instruction at these courses. This has proven to be a great engagement model. Currency and relevancy are our marks for success.

After Mr. Shannon finished explaining all the ways DAU is incorporating more content related to working with industry into the curriculum, Mr. Woolsey asked the Board to think about what DAU could be doing additionally or differently, to be more successful in helping the workforce better understand the industry perspective. The chairman agreed that this is an area where the board could really make a difference. This will be a topic of discussion at the next meeting.

ACQ 315 is now a requirement in three career fields. This is the first course where there have been students from multiple career fields in one course.

One challenge DAU is trying to address is: How do we encourage people to go get information they don't know they need? Need is driven by context. Knowledge is enabled and measured by application. Knowing is irrelevant, it is applying the knowledge that is the metric. Therefore, it is not about the asset, it is about the moment of need.

Faculty Development: Foundational Learning Director Mr. Tim Shannon

The training DAU gives its faculty practitioners is developed by learning experts. All faculty members must go through basic teaching and facilitation training. They must go through all the course content and audit the course before they can teach it. Regional deans are responsible for their faculty's certification. All courses are developed centrally. There is a specific managed process to get from practitioner to professor. Very specific additional instruction is required before conducting/participating in Mission Assistance activities.

There was some discussion around the term used to refer to faculty members—are they instructors who facilitate or facilitators who instruct? It is about perception. Instructor implies that the student is more passive. Facilitator implies an interactive event. Branding is very important in re-positioning especially in changing culture and perception. A certain term may not have the same weight within the department that it has in the learning sector. When faculty are consulting and facilitating, “instructor” may not be the right term. The faculty term may be something DAU wants to retain, but everyone does not have to be called the same thing. The level of credentials and perception is important, is the professor title really necessary?

Final Thoughts from the Board:

The customer session was very useful; board members also appreciated the regional perspective. It would be interesting to have the perspective of the Functional Leads and someone from OSD. It could be worth examining whether there is more we can do to make the certifications more similar to commercial certifications to make the transitions between government and industry easier.

***Recommendation:* In response to the Defense Business Board's 2014 report on innovation, DAU should prepare a response for every comment of “DAU/Acquisition workforce should...”

***Recommendation:* DAU should identify a formal process to provide feedback to senior leaders.

***DAU Suggestion:* DAU should explore contributing to the NDAA-mandated panel to streamline acquisition regulations to improve acquisition outcomes.

BoV members and candidates present:

VADM David Venlet, USN, Ret.

Mr. Bob Mosher

BGen Michael Brogan, USMC, Ret.

Ms. Anne Reed

Mr. Kimo Kippen

Dr. Allison Rosset

Maj. Gen. Erwin Lessel, USAF, Ret.

Mr. Charlie Williams

VADM Walter Massenburg, USN, Ret.

DAU West Region Customers:

Rear Admiral David Lewis, Commander, SPAWAR, accompanied by Steve Dunn

Dr. Robert Parker, Acting Executive Director, PEO C4I

Thomas Fitzgerald, Director, Engineering, Space and Missile Systems Center, AFSC

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