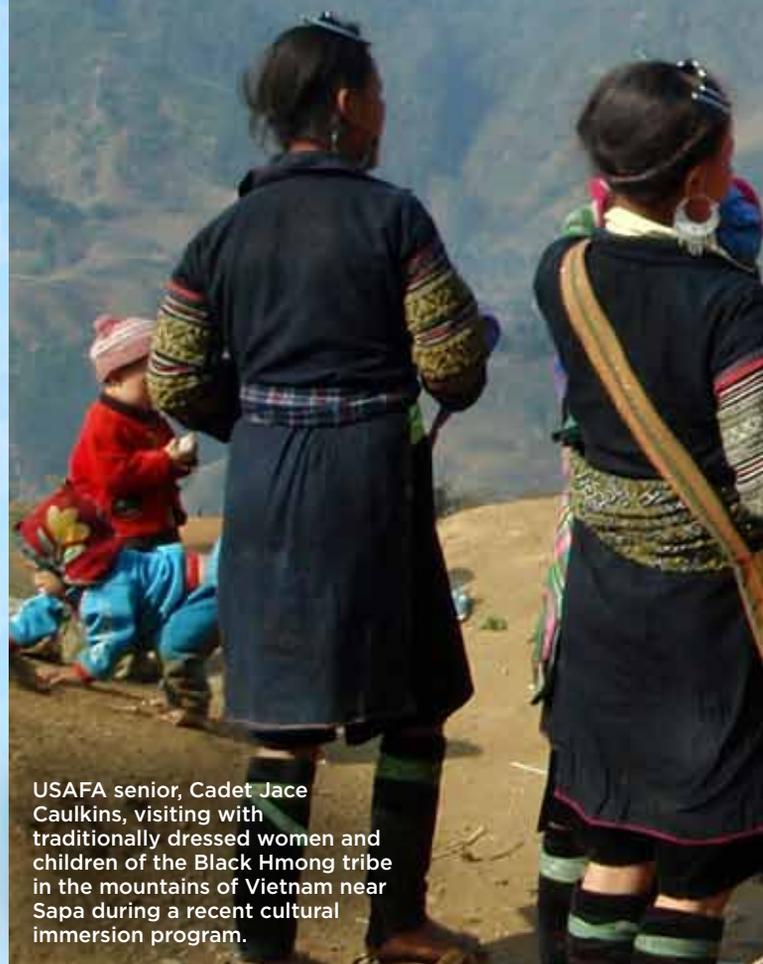


*Internationalization has become a priority for all types of higher education institutions in recent years, and military institutions are no exception.*

# A New GLOBAL Perspective

**By David Tobenkin**

**I**NTERNATIONALIZATION of higher education has progressed significantly in the last decade. There are more education abroad opportunities, more international students, more internships and work overseas, greater integration of internationalization in to the curriculum, and increasingly, more institutions taking hard looks at creating and sustaining internationalization strategies so a global focus remains part of an institution's culture for years to come. It may come as a surprise to many, but U.S. military higher education institutions are no exception—they too, are now beginning to internationalize.



USFA senior, Cadet Jace Caulkins, visiting with traditionally dressed women and children of the Black Hmong tribe in the mountains of Vietnam near Sapa during a recent cultural immersion program.



“It is part of the strategic environment we are in that we have to work with people of other cultures,” says Lieutenant Colonel Mark Gagnon, associate dean for international intellectual development in the Office of the Dean at West Point, located in New York. “Cadets need to show empathy with local cultures. The key is to negotiate not dictate. That is a change from the Cold War era. The goals of our international programs include getting cadets out of their comfort zones and developing them as leaders, in addition to developing their language skills. The Army is very aware of President Obama’s national security strategy to foster deeper connections across the globe. When we do military-to-military exchanges, for example, it improves our ability to adapt to unfamiliar situations and helps us build partnerships.”

**We have to understand the world and in order to be successful; we have to speak foreign languages, understand regions of the world, and appreciate other cultures and practices.**

*Lieutenant Colonel Mark Gagnon,  
associate dean for international intellectual  
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“The world is getting smaller,” echoes Timothy Disher, director of international programs at the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland. “We need to rely on partners more, as was outlined in a 2007 statement of naval strategy, *Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower*. Certainly defending the country and national interests are important, and, if at war, to win that war is important. But the strategy states that preventing wars is as important as winning wars. We have to understand the world and in order to be successful; we have to speak foreign languages, understand regions of the world, and appreciate other cultures and practices. As a result, we are trying to integrate, improve, and provide more [international] access to students.”

Many of the internationalization efforts at military education institutions are similar to internationalization efforts at non-military institutions that have swept through higher education for the past two decades. There are increased language programs, semester and summer abroad programs and exchanges, more international faculty and students on campus, increased international content in liberal arts subjects, more guest speakers, international language and cul-

ture clubs, and international events on campuses. In recent years, some military institutions are also creating internationalization plans for the first time ever.

Military higher education in the United States is a complex amalgam of different types of institutions. There are four federally mandated military institutions: The United States Military Academy, the United States Naval Academy, the United States Coast Guard Academy, and the United States Air Force Academy. At these institutions the federal government pays all tuition and expenses for students but, following graduation, students are committed to five years of active duty as officers and three years of reserve duty. Other institutions, such as the Virginia Military Institute, The Citadel, and North Georgia College and State University, are senior military colleges that are typically state-funded, though students also generally pay tuition. While their core curricula contains military components and often features military aspects such as uniforms and housing in barracks, students may or may not join the military following graduation. Other military education institutions include military academies and military junior colleges that primarily target high school students but also offer an associates degree to high school graduates. Finally, students at non-military universities can participate in the Reserve Officers’ Training Corps (ROTC) programs, which offer military instruction and funding for higher education for college students in return for a four-year service obligation at the end of the higher education program.



### **Focus on Foreign Languages**

Increasing cadets’ language proficiency is a particular focus at military education institutions. The focus on language is demonstrated at the Colorado-based U.S. Air Force Academy by a requirement that all cadets must now take at least two semesters of foreign language, and based on major, may be required to take four semesters, says Colonel Ronald Machoian, director of international programs at the Air Force Academy.

The Air Force Academy provides a Cadet Summer Language Immersion Program (CSLIP) that typically takes place during the summer between the three-degree [sophomore] and two-degree [junior] year and provides cadets the opportunity to expand their language skills in a rigorous, real-world environment. It is a three- or six-week program involving 20 hours of small group and personal instruction each week.



## Measuring Fluency Success— Even After Graduation

Military education institutions are also beginning to attempt to measure the value of different components of internationalization programs. “We keep metrics on the language abilities of our classes and we are developing ways to measure that better,” says Allen. “But we don’t only measure language proficiency. The Air Force is not just interested in language skills, but also to a significant degree in developing cross-cultural confidence. Perhaps one of the greatest outcome of our programs is that future junior officers and decision-making senior officers will have gained not only critical language skills, but also new perspectives on the world through experiences with a foreign culture and its language.”

Allen and other international education professionals at military institutions acknowledge that maintaining cadets’ and graduates’ language skills can be a challenge, particularly in graduates’ early years of military service, when the focus for young officers is on gaining basic military skills. Still, the Air Force has developed a program to try to keep language skills intact after graduation. In 2009, the Air Force began its Language Enabled Airman Program (LEAP), whereby young officers and Air Force Academy cadets and ROTC students are vetted for acceptance into a voluntary program based upon possession of language skills of interest to Air Force, says Jay Warwick, director of the Language Department of the Air Force Culture and Language Center at Maxwell Air Force Base in Montgomery, Alabama. The selected officers are given intensive language training after graduation to keep their language skills high.

Warwick says that in summer 2010, 125 graduating cadets were sent to various venues overseas, including China, Germany, Japan, Ukraine, Morocco, Brazil, and Costa Rica, and the United States for four to six weeks. “The course of study varied but the common theme for each they had structured language academics for four to six hours per day,” Warwick says. “Those overseas stayed with host families and got to experience the culture. That’s the first year we’ve done that for LEAP.”

The LEAP program will also offer officers distance learning opportunities to keep language skills fresh, track their development, and, it is planned, give them work assignments that utilize their language skills throughout their careers.

## Formalizing Internationalization

Senior military colleges such as Charleston, South Carolina-based The Citadel, and Lexington, Virginia-based Virginia Military Institute (VMI), and Dahlonga, Georgia-based North Georgia College and State University are also increasing their international components.

At Virginia Military Institute, only about 60 percent of students are actually commissioned in the military, though they must have a military haircut, wear uniforms, parade, live in barracks, and take four years of ROTC training, says Timothy McElhannon, VMI’s director of international programs.

In fiscal year 2010, it featured eight foreign languages with 294 Air Force Academy cadets and 34 faculty escorts participating.

Kellan Bethke, now in his final year at the Air Force Academy, participated in two separate language immersions 2009 and 2010 at a local language school in Kiev, Ukraine, and a semester abroad program in Russia at St. Petersburg Polytechnic University. “In Russia, I mainly took language courses, with some additional courses that revolved around communist based history and current events, the history of the Orthodox Church, and the history of St. Petersburg. I’ve taken Russian all four years at the Academy. I came into the Academy with zero Russian experience, and at this point I am proficient in Russian.”

International educational opportunities are also available to ROTC participants at other, non-military institutions. Project GO, funded by the federal Defense Language Office, provides scholarships to ROTC students in three services for critical languages study domestically and abroad. Administered by the Institute of International Education on behalf of the National Security Education Program and the Defense Language Office, Project GO provides institutional grants to 22 U.S. universities across the country, including five of the six Senior Military Colleges and supports programs in a number of languages deemed critical by the Department of Defense: Arabic, Chinese, Hausa, Hindi/Urdu, Korean, Pashto, Persian (Dari, Farsi, Tajik), Russian, Swahili, Uzbek, and Wolof, says a spokesperson from the National Security Education Program.

Since 2007, Project GO has awarded approximately \$9.3 million in institutional grants that have provided over 860 domestic and overseas summer scholarships to ROTC students for critical language study. Grant funding has also supported university infrastructure in the critical languages and created venues for communication amongst ROTC leadership and university personnel. Many schools use Project GO grants to fund the difference between the costs for a semester at the home institution and the cost of a semester abroad, says the spokesperson.

Project GO funds generally support direct student scholarships, program coordinators, language instructors, curriculum development, and outreach initiatives to support existing language programs. Some Project GO institutions also use their funding to provide academic year tutoring, to offset additional study abroad costs during the academic year, or to host guest speakers on cultural topics.

“Our superintendent arrived at VMI in 2003 and formulated a vision for 2039, when we turn 200 years old, including preparing cadets for service throughout the world,” says Cindy Irby, international programs coordinator. “The goal is for every cadet to have the opportunity to have an international experience. It might not be a traditional study abroad. It could be sharing a room with an international student, hosting an international cadet, or having an international teacher.”

“Over the past seven years, the number of cadets who have had an international experience abroad has increased and we have created a Civilizations and Cultures core curriculum requirement that requires every cadet to take two courses that are focused on learning outcomes related to international aspects of a particular academic field,” says McElhannon. Irby says the increase in education abroad experiences is greatest for summer programs, with the number of students studying abroad for four to six weeks while at the institution, which has 1,500 students, rising from 51 in 2005 to 83 scheduled for summer 2011.



Virginia Military Institute (VMI)

At VMI, sending students to Middle Eastern countries has been a large trend, Irby says: “There’s been a big increase in Arabic study abroad [and in general study in Arab countries]. This summer we had 26 students study in Morocco. That’s due in large part to a DOD [Department of Defense] grant that provides scholarships for cadets to study Arabic. For the past semester, we did an exchange with Texas A&M—they have campus in Qatar that teaches engineering, which is a good fit because 50 percent of our students are science and engineering majors. It’s very difficult for engineers study abroad so it helps that this DOD grant is in part geared to STEM students. We worked with Texas A&M and they accepted four of our engineering students to study there this year. Our department was very supportive. We have four engineers in Doha this semester, three in Jordan, one in Morocco, and one who started in Egypt but ended up in Scotland after the unrest in Egypt. There are 36 abroad this semester total.”

One area that VMI has also addressed is the possibility that some students will seek to use experiences abroad as an opportunity to escape from the institution’s disciplined environment, itself an irony given that many students choose to attend VMI in the first place precisely because of that discipline. “When I first began working as director in fall 2004, I felt that some cadets used study abroad (during the semester) as an escape from the military life of VMI,” says McElhannon. “Over the past seven years we have been able to change that situation by establishing a policy that cadets must have a 2.5 or higher GPA in order to study abroad and that cadets may only study abroad for one semester during their four year cadetship. They may study abroad as many summers as they can, depending on their summer ROTC training commitments, financial situation, and other considerations. I have worked on multiple fronts, with faculty and cadets to ensure that study abroad is considered a serious academic enrichment program. Now we tie study abroad to specific academic goals and we have removed the “vacation” aspect from study abroad.”

The institution also offers other programs that increase exposure to international issues, Irby notes. Some students, for example, participate in the Model Arab League program in Washington, D.C. every year. “They participate in that as a group of students, faculty members talk to them, and they are assigned a country, similar to the Model United Nations,” Irby says. “We also have International Education Week where there are international meals in the dining hall, and we recently had International Poetry Night, in which more than forty people read poems in sixteen foreign languages. The readers were mostly cadets but also included faculty and staff members.”

## The Presence of International Scholars and Students

Foreign professors also add an international element. VMI Visiting Professor Heba El-Shazli, originally of Egypt, helped students participate in the Model Arab League program, led them on a tour of Washington diplomats and think tanks, teaches Arabic in the Egyptian dialect, and on December 26 through January 25, only days before the Egyptian Uprising began, led 10 students on a tour of Cairo, Alexandria and Upper Egypt locations such as Aswan. Students experienced the realities of tensions in the region when a Coptic church was bombed three blocks away from them, close enough that, El-Shazli says, that the students “could feel it when the bomb went off.”

“I try to achieve a number of goals with students,” El-Shazli says. “We want them to have a better understanding of the history and politics of the region and to not paint Arabs with a broad brush—‘all Arabs are this way.’ Students learn that every Arab country is quite distinct. I think learning about the region’s diversity and complexity gives students a better understanding and to question and not accept things at face value, as well as to understand the culture and the language.”

Foreign cadets studying at VMI also are also a source of diversification, says McElhannon. “One of the best things about VMI is that we take international students from military exchanges, treat them just like any other students, and integrate them very quickly. It’s a military bootcamp like West Point—we call new cadets ‘Rats.’ Regardless of where they are from or from what demographic background, they get thrown into the system and treated the same, put in a barracks, four cadets to a room. So you’ll have one student from Taiwan or Thailand put in with three American cadets. So foreign students don’t get segregated, unlike some U.S. schools, where international students are segregated and put in their own bubble. Our foreign students go through rigorous training and learn about VMI culture very quickly.”

Military junior colleges are also expanding their global reach, with some reaching out to foreign nationals who seek the regimen of a military instruction experience.

Wentworth Military Academy and College, a private, co-educational military high school and two-year college based in Lexington, Missouri, is actively marketing itself to foreign students and working to expand its international offerings, says Cristhina Starke, director of international admissions, who says that 14 international boarding students on campus are in the junior college program, of 110 boarding junior college students and more than 1,000 junior college students total (including non-boarding). “They come here for many reasons, including structure and discipline,” Starke says. “We don’t require language proficiency testing and offer intensive English programs on campus based on their level of language skills and, once they improve their proficiency, they attend the regular classes. We also offer classes like Arabic and Farsi.”

She says that the Academy also hopes to start a summer abroad program for junior college students.

## Developing an Internationalization Plan

Another senior military college stepping up its international education components is North Georgia College and State University.

“Our internationalization plan was developed in summer 2009,” says Dlynn Armstrong-Williams, director of North Georgia’s Center for Global Engagement. “We were making a lot of inroads in internationalization but were interested in keeping the focus on what we were doing to guide future funding, programming, and to make sure any internationalization follows strategic guidelines.”

She says that the plan was developed by her office, the now vice president of external affairs, deans of different schools, and representatives of student government. “The plan has helped us because it has provided regional areas of focus,” Armstrong-Williams says.

“We have curricular initiatives along with strategic language initiatives linked to the languages we offer.”

While North Georgia is a senior military institution, students planning on military careers are a minority of all students on campus with only 800 of 6,000 students on campus being core cadet students, Armstrong-Williams says. “Uniforms are not required of all students and we have students in pajamas and flip-flops next to students in battle dress uniforms. What’s interesting is that they have become very tolerant of one another. We have tradition of integration such that no one carries along preconceived notions that if you are wearing a uniform you have these beliefs and if you don’t, you don’t have a pro-military outlook. Students accept each other quickly.”

**I have worked on multiple fronts, with faculty and cadets to ensure that study abroad is considered a serious academic enrichment program.**

*Timothy McElhannon,  
VMI’s director of international programs*

There is a divide, however, in access to foreign educational experiences and it tends to run in the favor of cadets, rather than civilian students, Armstrong-Williams says. “We try to make sure all programs available to all our students, but the difference is the amount of funding and economic support you can receive. Funding from the Department of Defense has enabled there to be more scholarships for cadets. Also, we have some alumni who are interested in providing experiences for cadets, so the cadets get more economic support and it incentivizes their participation more. My hope is that we get more funding so we can provide the experiences to all students.”

A new program that will be open only to cadets is the cadet English language-training program. “We will partner a group of cadets with an ESL teacher to go to countries that are allies and offer English language training for foreign soldiers. That is to encourage cross-cultural education. They will run a pilot this summer not for academic credit and it may start for credit next summer. It will probably send them to locations in Africa and South Asia.”

The college is also hoping to focus on transforming soldiers into diplomats as well. The school in 2007 began offering an international affairs undergraduate degree and later established an online masters of international affairs program that is mainly for military graduates and others stationed overseas. “That has helped develop the international affairs-diplomacy-diplomat soldier mission we have,” says Armstrong-Williams, who says that 125 to 130 students are in the international affairs degree program now.

“What’s exciting about this is all these programs are going on at once and there is a reason to the madness,” says Armstrong-Williams. “As students’ language skills develop, it feeds into international affairs and, we hope, into future careers in international intelligence.”

The CIA is very excited about our programs. A group study abroad experience can be more controlled. And international internships allow them to further learn cultural norms, so it's not just in and out. We also follow up on the experience and ask students if they want, for example, to be regional experts or experts just in China. If regional expert in Asia, they should go elsewhere in Asia for another international experience. If Chinese experts, they should go somewhere else in China. They now are learning cultural nuances at a depth and level that was sometimes missing."

In that vein, the school hopes to prepare students for Peace Corps participation with a new bachelor's degree program that Armstrong-Williams calls Peace Corps Prep. "We have constructed a curriculum for what the Peace Corps looks for and we are having that approved. It will be not only for soldiers, and citizen-soldiers, but also for those who join NGOs. The curriculum will require a certain level of foreign language achievement, a global awareness course, and an international issues course. We hope to start offering

that in Fall 2011 and my guess is that the clientele will be 50 percent cadet, 50 percent civilian."

The university also offers a combined intensive language and summer language intensive programs in Chinese and Arabic, with 12 to 15 students currently in

each. Students take Chinese in up to eight courses in a year and, after they complete that, go to China to study Chinese again for eight weeks in summer. An equivalent program focuses on Arabic. Unlike many programs, the intensive language training is featured in the first year, with other core requirements taught later: "They are in language every day until 3:30 p.m.," says Armstrong-Williams. She said many of the students in the intensive Chinese language program want to double major in Chinese and international affairs.

### **Cultural Immersion**

The Air Force Academy offers Cultural Immersion programs, typically ten days or two weeks in length. "It's a competitive process and there are more applicants than we can fund," says Machoian. "Cadets get to work with a faculty escort steeped in the region and they put in a competitive proposal. This year we asked that the proposals relate their anticipated experience to an academic theme, whether studying the civil engineer-

ing feat of the Panama Canal, or historical institutions of government in Greece. Those are examples of what we hope to see in the successful applications—a plan to learn not only about culture and language elements but also a disciplinary thread, thus achieving multiple-layered learning outcomes," he says. "One example of an approved proposal is a program taking cadets going through parts of China and Russia exploring portions of the Trans-Mongolian and Trans-Siberian Railroads, not only for their obvious engineering aspects, but also historic socio-political themes involving governance and economic progress. That's roughly a three-week trip with many side excursions taken to study specific historic and cultural sites, so of course it will be limited to just portions of each railroad."

The Air Force Academy's Deputy Director of International Programs, Lieutenant Colonel Scot Allen, led an immersion to Rwanda in 2010, with an engineering theme that reflects his background. The cadets did engineering work at an orphanage, where they developed and tested new fuel efficiency cook stoves by building combustion chambers.

This summer, the Air Force Academy is launching an introductory program for international program participants to help prepare them to have a richer international experience. Allen says: "We call it pre-immersion education. We will provide workshops that address culture on both general and regional levels and also specific mechanisms for communication. It will last a morning over four to five hours, both lecture and seminar style presentation, and will feature a discussion of cross-cultural skills as well as nuances of what to expect culturally—on a general, regional, and country-specific basis. That will be offered to a subset of cadets departing on programs for summer and fall."

### **Making Progress, One Step at a Time**

Internationalization efforts at military education institutions are somewhat different than they are at traditional colleges and universities. It's only been in more recent years that military institutions have begun to embrace internationalization.

Indeed, internationalization efforts at military institutions are, of necessity, targeted toward the needs of a military career, as many graduates pursue that path. As a result, military internationalization efforts often have particular focus on learning languages and interacting with foreign military peers—in recent years, curricula changes to be more global in perspective, international internships, cultural immersion, and more traditional education abroad opportunities have been added.



The chapel at Air Force Academy in Colorado



**West Point cadets at the Military Academy in Mozambique**

These efforts take place in an atmosphere at such institutions where a demanding core curricula and military-leadership and training obligations during the academic years and summers challenge administrators to find time and financial and administrative resources for international educational offerings. The federal service institutions, for example, require their cadets and midshipmen to graduate in the allotted four years and have an extensive science and math core curriculum. Cadets and midshipmen are required to engage in leadership and military training programs each summer that devour many of those weeks. At senior state military colleges, such obligations are similar with some exceptions. Since students pay for their own educations, for example, they may extend their instruction beyond four years—though the regimented daily schedule and barracks housing at some institutions can lead some students to desire not to do so.

These logistical challenges have limited some international offerings and slowed the development of others. Thus, compared to civilian programs, international-themed majors are fewer or nonexistent, given the time and resource demands of the core curricula. Education abroad opportunities tend to be for a semester or less rather than for a year, and summer abroad programs tend to be for a matter of weeks rather than months. And there is fierce competition for the more desirable and resource-intensive experiences among cadets, given that the federal government or limited private source scholarships are often footing the bill.

Gagnon says he can only marvel at the opportunities open to current cadets and recent graduates when compared to opportunities available when he was a West Point cadet not that long ago: “I graduated from West Point in 1990 as a German major and my crowning achievement in international experience was one week in Germany. In the 1990s, about 60 of 1,000 cadets had an international experience by the end of their term,” Gagnon says. “Now, of our cadets, roughly 60 percent have an international experience by the end of their term. We had two cadets study abroad in 1997,

then, in 2006, we sent more cadets, 21 cadets in seven countries. In our most recent year, 2010, we sent 138 cadets to 15 countries.”

At West Point, international internships, though available since the 1990s, started to increase in number only in 2007, with 338 interns then, rising to 436 interns in 2010 in 55 countries, says Gagnon. Such internships generally last three to four weeks due to military training for cadets in summer. Internship programs include postings with government agencies, military organizations, non-profits, or nongovernmental organizations, says Gagnon.

On the other hand, other international aspects at military education institutions are of longstanding vintage. The Naval Academy has had foreign students enrolled in its full four-year program since 1863 and has produced foreign 400 graduates from 70 countries to date, Disher says. “The U.S.

midshipmen will interact with them throughout their careers and work with them, which is the purpose of the program,” says Disher.

For many institutions, the challenge has been how to maximize the return on internationalization efforts given the special time and funding resource challenges that they face. As outlined in a recent academic article by Disher, Naval Academy Professor of History Maochun Miles Yu, and Naval Academy Academic Dean and Provost Andrew T. Phillips in the journal *Liberal Education*, the Naval Academy’s conceptual answer has been multipronged. First, it has adapted civilian models for the delivery of global education to the unique constraints faced by the Academy. Thus, given time limitations for midshipmen, the traditional education abroad program has been limited by law to a semester, rather than a full academic year. Many exchanges are with foreign military institutions.

For countries where direct naval academy to naval academy exchanges have not yet been developed, as with China, midshipmen study at a civilian university. When this program began five years ago, a midshipman typically enrolled in non-language subjects relating to the host country in English and language courses taught in the host language, but now, with the creation of a Chinese language major in Annapolis, the midshipman now enroll in courses completely taught in Chinese. Currently, resources have been able to support sending 25 to 30 Academy midshipmen per year abroad in such semester-long programs. The Naval Academy has a goal to increase that to over 100 midshipmen per year by 2015, Disher says.

The Academy also has altered its curriculum to incorporate more global themes in liberal arts classes. “We have a core curriculum of 47 months and we’ve been looking at what we’re doing and why we’re doing it that way,” Disher says. The Academy has over the past three to four years, for example, “added more emphasis on different cultures” in the content of the three history courses that all midshipman have traditionally been required to take: U.S. Naval History, Western Civilization I, and Western Civilization II, Disher says, noting the last

two have been renamed The West in a Global Context and The West in the Modern World, respectively. In addition, the Academy has added two new region-focused courses, Asia in a Global Context and The Middle East in a Global Context, as allowable alternatives to The West in a Global Context course.

To increase midshipmen's exposure to international cultures, the Academy has also added five regional study forums that support lectures and cultural performances and films centered around Africa, Asia, Latin America, Eurasia, and the Middle East, Disher says.

### **What Propelled "International" to the Forefront**

A seminal event in the internationalization of all U.S. military education institutions occurred in 2005, with publication by the U.S. Department of Defense of the Defense Language Transformation Roadmap. "[Then Secretary of Defense Donald] Rumsfeld in that document challenged each service to develop programs to develop languages, regional awareness, and cultural un-



Visitors center at U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland

expertise than in the past, which helped with the development of courses," Disher says.

The Roadmap also led to a formalization of international efforts at some military education institutions, with some creating or expanding international offices to consolidate international programs on campus. The Naval Academy's Office of International Programs, for example, started in December 2005. "Before that, we were sending midshipman abroad and doing other international things but not necessarily in a coordinated fashion," says Disher. "The president of our university wanted the international office to be a one-stop shopping resource with everything with international engagement and support from his office."

### **Witnessing Foreign Relations Firsthand**

For some students, international backgrounds or experiences can make them witnesses to history. Lieutenant Paul Angelo, a 2006 graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy, was exposed to direct international diplomacy while serving as an assistant to a senior officer:

"As a 21-year-old college student, I assisted Rear Admiral John Sigler at a military-to-military peace talks between the Israeli and Palestinian security forces in Istanbul, Turkey. For an entire week, I observed direct meetings between military commanders on both sides of the conflict that Turkish, U.S., Egyptian, and Iraqi delegations mediated. In the course of the conference, the Israelis and Palestinians openly addressed grievances, such as specific security checkpoints and prisoners of war, for the first time in nearly a decade. And for the first time in my life, I witnessed international diplomacy in action. I was impressed by the historical importance of events unfolding right before my eyes, and I became fascinated by the process of international dialogue."

**We had two cadets study abroad in 1997, then, in 2006, we sent more cadets, 21 cadets in seven countries. In our most recent year, 2010, we sent 138 cadets to 15 countries.**

*Lieutenant Colonel Mark Gagnon,  
associate dean for international intellectual  
development in the Office of the Dean at West Point*

derstanding. From that document, international efforts have become more institutionalized than in the past," says Disher. "That came out of a post-9/11 environment. We realized that we could improve knowledge of language and culture and how we interact with those outside the United States. And with that Roadmap came the resources to develop semester abroad programs and our summer immersion programs."

Disher says that in response to Roadmap, each of the federal services academies was given money to support each of the three areas stressed in the Roadmap (languages, regional awareness, and cultural understanding): "With that money, we hired 13 new language professors that increased our language and cultural practices. The faculty had more diverse

After graduation, Angelo pursued a master's course in Latin American Studies at Oxford University. He is currently assigned to the Military Group at the U.S. Embassy in Bogota, Colombia, where he serves as the U.S. Navy's Regional Officer for the Pacific Coast.



**Army Lieutenant First Class Erik Tomsen participated in several international experiences during his time at West Point. He is currently deployed to Afghanistan.**

## Applied International Knowledge

International experiences at military higher education institutions teach its graduates lessons that will serve them well in their future. These graduates, like U.S. Army Lieutenant First Class Erik Tomsen—who was recently deployed to the dangerous province of Kandahar, Afghanistan—has not only extensive training in engineering from the United States Military Academy at West Point, but he also has another tool far superior to that of many graduates of a generation ago: a diverse and robust set of international experiences. During his four-year college career, he participated in a Foreign Academies Exchange Program, in Sibiu,

Romania; an advanced military development training program in Bad Salzungen, Germany; a one-semester Foreign Academies Exchange Program, in Munich, Germany, where Tomsen attended the German Armed Forces University, taking all courses in German; and a three-week advanced individual academic development geography excursion in Uzbekistan.

In addition to general lessons of adapting to new cultures and different lifestyles,

Tomsen says the experiences, particularly those from Uzbekistan, provided him with powerful lessons that he can use when he heads to Afghanistan. The goal of the experience was to learn about the physical and cultural geography of Uzbekistan and the Central Asian Region and how agricultural policies in the region can be improved. He learned firsthand from a profession who was writing his dissertation on Uzbek cultural geography.

“It was amazing to learn of the failed Soviet agricultural policies, by which rivers were siphoned off to create a cotton monoculture, impacted the region. Irrigation was conducted in a very inefficient manner—over time, due to poor maintenance, the pipes corroded and the water leaked out—causing one of Uzbekistan’s most valuable resources to simply evaporating under the hot desert sun,” explains Tomsen.

“Siphoning of the major river systems feeding the Aral Sea resulted in a dramatic drop in the water level and an increase in salinity. An entire aquatic ecosystem and way of life dependant on it were virtually destroyed.”

Tomsen found the knowledge gained directly relevant to his upcoming work in Afghanistan. “This is relevant in Afghanistan because there are many agricultural and water diversion projects currently underway,” he says. “One lesson to be learned is that there needs to be constant maintenance and a look at the overall impact of a given project downstream. We do environmental impact assessments on all projects in the Corps of Engineers now, but we need to take a harder look at maintenance. We can’t stay in Afghanistan forever; we want to pass the project on to the locals so they are able to run their own waterworks and provide for themselves. One of the most powerful ways we can do this is by showing them the potential impacts of when projects go wrong. Uzbekistan is not so far away from Afghanistan, after all.”

Without such an experience of studying the geography of the nearby nation of Uzbekistan, Tomsen very well may have not been able to apply this knowledge with the work being done with in Afghanistan. So, when it is time to pass the running of the agricultural and waterworks projects to the local population, they will be able benefit from the knowledge of what happened in Uzbekistan.

Tomsen is just one military graduate who has been taught the value of gaining more international insight. While progress toward internationalization at military higher education institutions is still being made, it has made some strides in recent years. And of course, the work of internationalization at any institution never stops—more can always be done.

However, it is important to recognize that nowadays, thousands of the new generation of students trained at military higher education institutions graduate with a greater global understanding than in decades past. Military academy graduates often become officers and pursue military careers while those who attend other military higher education institutions sometimes pursue other options. Whatever path they take, today’s graduates are more likely to equipped with an international lens that did not exist in the past, which will

serve them—and society—well in whatever profession they choose whether they are civilians or in the armed forces. **IE**



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