

NCOES: Evaluating the Good, Bad, & Ugly

By SGM Terry Ogerly

NCOES is an institutional approach to developing creative, logical and quick-thinking leaders who can apply Army training and fighting doctrine in their units.

As an institution, the Army reaches its goals with varying degrees of success. How can NCOs and units improve NCO academies and NCOES courses? Results from accreditation evaluations tell us how well we meet the Army's standards. These results also show why certain installations and their leaders achieve standards that elude other commands. They also show what NCOs and units can do to improve the academies and courses in which they have a vested interest.

The standard

The Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) regulation 351-17 delegates responsibility among the subject expert training developers, NCO academies and accreditation teams. In the future, Reserves will be subject to this same process.

Evaluations focus on training rather than administrative processes. Major areas include standardization, quality of training, the schoolhouse environment and training resources.

Academies receive one of three ratings:

- **Accredit.** No significant shortcomings affect training, but a report of corrective actions might be required.
- **Withhold accreditation.** Minor shortcomings affect training. Accreditation is withheld and 60 days is allowed for corrective action.
- **Not accredit.** Major shortcomings exist. Previous accreditation is rescinded and corrective action is required. The school is re-evaluated within six to nine months.

Schools that do extremely well on evaluations have several things in common. They have the full support of their post commanders and CSMs and they emphasize NCO training. This support is critical to meeting the standard. The involvement of an installation's senior leadership is also reflected in the appearance of academies. It is

further obvious by the leadership's responsiveness to resolving problems that detract from quality training, along with keeping open lines of communications. Finally, the best schools are on posts that provide the necessary facilities, personnel and equipment.

Forces Command (FORSCOM) installations traditionally do well on evaluations. They make NCOES a priority because they readily see the rewards of returning needed leadership back to their local units. They realize an almost immediate return on their investment.

TRADOC installations traditionally fare less well. The priorities at many of these locations include basic training, advanced individual training, and officer and warrant officer training. NCOES often becomes the last priority.

Common Leader Training

FM 100-5 states: "The most essential element of combat power is competent and confident leadership." This is achieved in part by integrating Common Leader Training (CLT) into phase two of BNCOC and ANCOC. These courses must also be designed to challenge students to demonstrate their leadership, training and technical and tactical skills. However, many proponents have delayed integrating this training or have not integrated it fully. In plain English, this means: NCOs in these courses are not being trained, evaluated and counseled on leadership tasks that are essential in a wartime environment.

By not integrating CLT, many courses resemble the basic technical courses that were taught in the 1970s. The absence of CLT degrades the leadership skills that NCOs should have when they return to their units. These NCOs will not be fully prepared to lead in battle.

Command emphasis

Successful academies exist where commanders and CSMs get involved and ensure that resources are available to support proper training. Ranges, training areas and equipment must be made available. Some

installations do not have adequate classroom space to meet school requirements. Others do not have sufficient billeting to support the desired environment for students. Academies should train students in the type of environment that students will return to and enforce. Unfortunately, many academy barracks are World War II-era wooden buildings that are substandard and often unsafe. Such conditions defy the intent of providing realistic, achievable and consistent standards.

NCOES training should be conducted in a challenging, live-in, leadership-intensive environment that reinforces leadership and professional skills. It should complement students' academic training and daily routines. When academy standards reflect Army standards, NCOs will enforce them in their units.

Academy environment

The key to an effective academy environment is the constructive use of students' time — both in and out of the classroom. Students are expected to plan, supervise and perform academy-related activities as they would in their units. When an academy requires NCOs to stand at parade rest while waiting in the chow line, they degrade the NCO rank and instead treat students like basic trainees. Some installations transport NCOES students in "cattle cars" while AIT students across post ride in buses. In reality, installations receive funding to support AIT courses; and this creates a disparity at the expense of NCOs and academies.

Often, equipment is not available or is outdated. One academy was training NCOs using an old cannon that was borrowed from the post museum. Students need to train with equipment that is used in their units. Similarly, the "old school" approach is too often alive and well. Some academies require foot locker and wall locker displays of useless items, such as tooth powder and shaving brushes. Others require students to shine brass latrine pipes with Brasso. What leadership training value do students receive in such an environment?

Academies with dynamic commandants and staffs understand the requirements of running their schools and NCOES courses. They understand that the very heart of a successful course focuses on the selection of quality small-group leaders, coupled with a quality course manager. This Small Group Instruction (SGI) works best at academies

that have adequate resources — suitable classrooms, smaller instructor-student ratios, etc.

SGI fosters the goal of developing creative, logical and quick-thinking leaders. It increases student involvement and responsibility in the learning process. Experienced group mentors use group process methods and techniques to stimulate learning by shifting the emphasis away from "what to think" toward "how to think." SGI places the responsibility to learn on the student, through group participation and student assignments as discussion leader. However, there is still reluctance to integrate SGI into many NCOES courses or to allow students to teach anything beyond CLT.

Substandard standard

Evaluations have also noted a common weakness in the quality of instruction of the Army Writing Program. This varies at acad-

emies from good to substandard. Student critiques often reflect this gap at certain installations. Another common problem is that academy FTX training and evaluation plans are not doctrinally correct and are not detailed enough to execute a quality operation.

Standards in appearance also vary. Many soldiers spend considerable amounts of money to purchase serviceable items before they attend an NCOES course. Others report with unserviceable uniforms — and that says something about the units of these NCOs.

Course developers play a key role in designing and supporting standards. But some fail in those responsibilities. Poor accreditation ratings often reflect the poor lesson materials that are provided to schools. Proper design and development of lesson materials significantly impacts leader development — as well as leadership — in the Army. Proponents that furnish excellent lesson materials greatly help academies earn accreditation.

Proponents must know and do their jobs. They must give their schools honest evaluations. There is a reluctance to tell the truth or to be the bearer of bad news, and the quality of instruction suffers as a result. One evaluation by a proponent, for example, noted that the evaluator was "impressed" because the instructor "had the students raise their hands to go to the latrine. He had good control." Such evaluations are typical. If this is the caliber of evaluations we give ourselves, it is no wonder that major problems are found during accreditation.

NCOES has undergone major changes in the past 10 years. The Army's leadership has vowed its continued support for professional NCO education. All that is left for the NCO Corps is to "make things happen" to bring all NCOES schools and courses up-to-date and in line with Army standards.

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