



Research Report: USMC.2016.0004 & USMC.2016.0005
Regional, Culture, and Language Familiarization Program Messaging

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BLUF

- As part of a larger assessment of CAOCL's training and education programs, CAOCL's translational researchers explored Marine awareness of the Regional, Culture, and Language Familiarization (RCLF) Program and how Marines understand the program's purpose.
- Researchers found the following:
 - Current RCLF Program messaging is reaching the ranks that are currently assigned regions but not all ranks (see table below) and not all ranks that need to know about the program to ensure program success. Important gaps: newly promoted sergeants and senior enlisted ranks.
 - How enlisted ranks hear about the RCLF Program is varied and can be inconsistent.
 - Marines' understanding of the program's purpose is not shared, revealing challenges with conveying the value of the program across the Marine Corps.
- These findings validate current efforts on curricular and policy redesign and offer insights for additional opportunities for change to ensure that the program is on the path to achieving its goals. See page 15 for recommendations.

Background on the Program Assessment

The Marine Corps' Regional, Culture, and Language Familiarization (RCLF) Program, implemented and managed by the Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning (CAOCL), is an online education program for all career Marines, administered via the Corps' distance learning platform, MarineNet. Marine officers are assigned a region of study at the Basic School (TBS) before they enter the operating forces, and enlisted Marines when promoted to sergeant are assigned a region and receive notification via a message through Marine Online¹. Marines who have been assigned a region are expected to complete rank-corresponding blocks of instruction prior to promotion.² The program is currently in its fifth year of existence. In partnership with 7th Marine Regiment in 29 Palms, California, in 2016, CAOCL initiated an assessment³ of components of the RCLF Program as part of its overarching assessment plan to ensure the program is on the path to realizing its vision.

“Globally Prepared – Regionally Focused” encapsulates the Marine Corps' vision under the RCLF Program. As the United States' premier crisis response force, the Marine Corps must be ready to deploy to any clime or

¹ According to Military.com, Marine Online is a “[r]esource for individual personnel records and documentation.”

http://www.military.com/Resources/ResourceSubmittedFileView?file=marines_links.htm.

² In 2012, the Marine Requirements Oversight Council established completion of the RCLF rank-corresponding education as a requirement for promotion; however, the professional military education order formalizing that requirement is currently in coordination and has yet to be signed.

³ The program assessment was carried out under the following institutional review board protocols: USMC.2016.0005 Qualitative Program Assessment CAOCL-MCU and USMC.2016.0004 RCLF Questionnaire.

place in any potential contingency at any given time. This demands a flexible, responsive organization and a Corps of Marines that possesses the requisite regional, cultural, and language knowledge and skills to inform planning and operations anywhere in the world at a moment’s notice. Recognizing the time and resource investments required to develop regional, cultural, and language capabilities across the general purpose force, the Marine Corps adopted a long-term education strategy designed to grow a set of core cultural concepts and skills throughout the Corps, allow Marines to exercise them in a specific regional context, and broaden Marines’ exposure to tactical language skills. Implementation of this educational strategy would result in a cultural capability for leaders to leverage in support of missions and requirements around the globe.

This report looks specifically at Marines’ general awareness of the program as well as how they are thinking about its purpose. As the program is in the early stages of implementation, CAOCL set out to discover what, if anything, Marines know about the RCLF Program and its intent, where they learned it, and how they use and value RCLF capabilities individually and in their units. CAOCL focused on deepening its understanding of how Marines are recalling and describing programmatic messaging. These findings may be used by CAOCL leadership to adjust current efforts so that individual Marines and leaders are better informed about the RCLF Program’s intent and capabilities.

Demographics of Research Population

The research was conducted with 7th Marine Regiment in 29 Palms, California. 7th Marines is an infantry regiment.

Figure 1: RCLF Messaging – Rank of Participants Broken Down by Research Method

RANK	SURVEY	INTERVIEWS	FOCUS GROUPS	TOTAL
Corporals and below	5	10	17	32
Lts/W1-2/Sgts	15	23	7	45
SSgts/W-3/Cpts and above	27	11	1	39
TOTAL	47	44	25	116

For the RCLF messaging component of the longitudinal program assessment, researchers gathered 116 responses⁴ via survey, interviews, and focus groups. For the survey, 7th Marine staff provided CAOCL 744 email addresses, informing CAOCL that the addresses favored the higher ranks due to lower ranking Marines not being issued .mil email addresses. These email addresses were drawn from throughout the regiment. CAOCL received 49 responses, two of which were incomplete. Thus, the total number of respondents was 47, a number too low to be able to generalize about the data across the regiment, but useful to inform programmatic understanding. For the interviews and focus groups, ninety-two participants gave voluntary verbal consent and were either interviewed individually or in small groups (from two up to 18). These individuals primarily came from 1st Battalion, 7th Marines. During the interviews, researchers asked questions about CAOCL training and education programs and learning materials. One area of focus was the RCLF Program. However, not all interviewees were asked about the RCLF Program; topics were time available and context dependent. Of the 92 participants, sixty-nine were specifically asked about the RCLF Program, twenty-five of which were in group

⁴ Important to note: the survey and interview/focus group populations may not be exclusive.

settings.

Due to the anticipated exposure of program messaging each of the ranks should have at this stage of program implementation, researchers broke the population down into three distinct rank categories. The first category is for corporals and below, of which there were 32 participants. The second is for lieutenants, sergeants, and warrant officers 1 and 2, of which there were 45 participants. The third category includes staff sergeants and higher enlisted ranks, warrant officers 3 through 5, and captains through colonels, of which there were 39 participants.

Method

The assessment employed both quantitative and qualitative methods. CAOCL designed and delivered an online survey via SurveyMonkey to all 7th Marine Regiment Marines with a .mil email address registered with the unit. The survey was administered in August 2016. Additionally, CAOCL conducted interviews in September and October 2016 while onsite at 29 Palms observing CAOCL-delivered training and a joint exercise with the Singaporean military. CAOCL staff used opportunistic sampling methods on training ranges and had assistance from 7th Marine staff in identifying potential participants in staff headquarters.

Researchers used descriptive statistics to analyze the quantitative survey data and coded both the open-text survey responses and interview/focus group data to identify themes. To identify intercoder reliability and address potential researcher bias, the six-person research team conducted a group coding exercise. The team coded five of the interviews separately, discussed code lists in pairs, and then presented the code lists to the group. The process validated identified themes as well as highlighted additional themes to present.

Potential Research Limitations

Neither qualitative nor quantitative research happens in a vacuum. Researchers must contend with the contingencies of the unique context in which they are doing research, and often this context shapes the outcomes of the research itself. Research is situated in specific places and times, and these aspects can impact the collection and production of data.

The research here presents a snapshot in time of Marine awareness and understanding of the RCLF Program. The research was carried out during August-October 2016. These dates are critical to contextualizing the responses of the participants in this research. Good education practice involves cyclical updates and evolution of program policies, curriculum, and assessment tools. The RCLF Program has undergone several significant changes in the last several years and, most recently in October 2016, with the release of updated course materials that address many of the concerns that Marines express in this research. All of the Marines in this study who had started or completed their rank-corresponding blocks of instruction were not exposed to these updated materials. CAOCL leadership has also modified messaging in MARADMINs and in briefings that include more emphasis on culture general core concepts and skills. It was difficult for the researchers to discern to which versions of the MARADMINs and briefings participants had been exposed. The researchers have factored the “dated” aspects of participants’ program experience into data analysis and their recommendations.

The predeployment context of an infantry regiment challenged the collection of data via survey and interviews. First, the time pressure during predeployment, with all the competing priorities and training requirements, is well-recognized. Researchers knew in advance that this would potentially impact response rate for the survey.

Researchers also found that Marines in their first enlistment are unlikely to have .mil email addresses and, thus, could not receive the emailed survey. Additionally, researchers discovered that many infantry Marines do not have regular access to a military computer, especially during predeployment work-up. This made access to the emailed survey challenging for Marines, and if they did access a computer, completing a survey may not have been a prioritized activity when using their limited computer time. Additionally, the on-site observation and interviews took place during a partnered military training exercise, an inherently busy time for infantry units preparing for deployment. The time and context potentially impacted the outcome of the research.

The predeployment context potentially impacted the production of data as well. Interviews are excellent qualitative tools for capturing people's experiences and beliefs. They allow participants to have more breadth and agency during data collection, and they allow for participants to supply the researcher with rich background and contextual information for the views they are expressing. Due to predeployment time pressures, the researchers recognize that this may have resulted in the presence of certain themes in the responses to questions about the RCLF Program that are more germane to the predeployment training environment and programs. Two such themes are time pressures to complete RCLF rank-aligned learning and describing RCLF learning in terms of a cultural brief. For example, although completion of RCLF is not linked to deployment and Marines have 3-6 years to complete each block of instruction, some of the interviewees expressed that finding time to complete RCLF would be challenging or a burden. This sentiment might possibly be attributed to the rushed and time-strapped situation that the Marines were in as the research was being conducted.

Finally, timing can potentially explain why some of the sergeants had not heard of the program. As described above, specific rank categories are expected to know about the program (lieutenants, warrant officers 1 and 2, and sergeants). The Marines who had not heard of RCLF included one warrant officer 2, and five sergeants. This could be perceived as a messaging failure. However, at least two of the five sergeants were just recently promoted to the rank of sergeant, were assigned to an infantry unit, and had not had the opportunity to attend the Sergeants Course yet. Several sergeant participants informed the researchers that they learned of their RCLF involvement via Marine Online, which requires access to a computer, or through the Sergeants Course. Newly-promoted sergeants assigned to an infantry unit may not have attended the Sergeants Course, and they also may not have access to computers, and so they would not have received the automatic message informing them of their RCLF regional assignment.

Findings

As designed, the RCLF Program will take years to permeate the force. Currently, sergeants, lieutenants, warrant officers 1 and 2, and some staff sergeants, captains, and warrant officers 3 are actively engaged in the program. When the program matures and the first enrollees reach senior ranks, all Marines, sergeants and above, will be actively participating with the program throughout their careers.

Where and when Marines hear about the program varies. Also, the content of that message – depending on source – varies. There was some concern within CAOCL leadership that Marines lacked basic awareness of the program and that there were gaps in their messaging efforts. Therefore, CAOCL leadership wanted to ask Marines if they have heard about the program and from where and what they understood about the program. Awareness – both on the surface and on a deeper level – is critical as it impacts the ability for the program to realize its vision of being a transformative force in the Marine Corps.

CAOCL uses a number of different methods to inform the force about the RCLF Program. CAOCL provides briefings at TBS for newly-promoted lieutenants and warrant officers and opportunistic briefings at Marine Corps University schools and courses. It has also issued MARADMINs and other official correspondence and documents, and created a web presence with program information. This study did not look at the content of each of these communication means, but rather asked the participants if they had heard of the program and from where, what their trusted source is for career information, and, if they had heard of the program, what they understood as its purpose.

- **Basic Level of Awareness**

Figure 2: RCLF Awareness among Participants

RANK	HEARD OF RCLF	NEVER HEARD OF RCLF	TOTAL
Corporals and below	5	27	32
Lts/W1-2/Sgts	39	6	45
SSgts/W-3/Cpts and above	29	10	39
TOTAL	73	43	116

One would expect that sergeants, lieutenants, and warrant officers 1 and 2 would be aware of the program, given their enrollment status in the program. This was confirmed in both the survey and interview data for the officers. With the exception of one warrant officer 2, all officers who responded to the survey, regardless of rank, had heard of the program. In the interview population, all but one of the officers had heard of the program. They were of the lieutenant and captain ranks. There was one lieutenant colonel interviewed about the RCLF Program, and this individual had not heard of it. This suggests that the messaging strategies used by CAOCL are mostly effective at reaching the officers, especially the ranks that have been given regional assignments. TBS and MARADMINs were frequently cited as informational sources in the survey population.

Within the enlisted ranks, the findings were mixed. All sergeants in the survey population had heard of the program, and thirteen of the 18 sergeants in the interview/focus group population had as well. Several of the sergeants noted their regional assignments, as one sergeant put it, “popped up in my MOL⁵ one day so I researched it myself.”⁶ Enlisted PME institutions were not as frequently cited as sources of program information; that said, some of the interviewees were attending a Sergeant’s Course, in which a RCLF orientation brief was provided. As discussed above in the section on limitations, the researchers suspect that the fact that the five sergeants in the interview/focus group population had not heard of the program was most likely due to their being newly promoted sergeants with limited or no access to a computer during the predeployment workup in their infantry unit and, thus, were unable to access Marine Online. This does suggest there may be a gap in messaging for younger in rank sergeants or could just reflect the impact of time and context on the individual answering the questions.

As to be expected at this point in program implementation, awareness within the ranks of corporal and below was inconsistent and dependent on particular leadership or the use of RCLF materials as training resources. The data reveal another potential gap in messaging with the senior enlisted (E-6s and above). In the survey

⁵ MOL: Marine Online.

⁶ Respondent #23, Sergeant, RCLF Survey, August 2016.

population, of the 14 senior enlisted respondents, seven had not heard of the program, and the two of the three staff sergeants who were interviewed had not heard of the program. This may suggest a gap in CAOCL's current messaging strategies and may prompt discussion on how to reach senior enlisted with more consistency.

Ensuring leadership is aware of the program is imperative for two reasons. First, in the survey, respondents were asked to write down who or what was their most trusted source when it comes to career-specific information. The theme most prevalent in their responses was leadership, followed by Marine official correspondence and online resources. CAOCL's institutionalization efforts address the correspondence component, and these data reinforce the importance of that effort. Within the enlisted side, especially with the absence of a TBS-like kick-off for sergeants, having informed leadership will be helpful in socializing the program and its requirements with subordinates. As more Marines mature in rank through the program, this aspect will become less critical.

The second reason for engaged leadership, however, becomes more critical as the program matures. To realize the vision of the program, it requires action on the part of both the individual and leaders. Leaders are to leverage RCLF-generated capabilities in operational planning and execution. The first step to action is basic awareness.

- **Deeper Awareness of Program Intent**

Of course, more important is awareness on a deeper level of programmatic intent. The RCLF Program is complex and multi-faceted, and its vision is long term and transformative. CAOCL has had a challenge in finding a consistent message to convey the intent of the RCLF Program. CAOCL leadership wanted to better understand how Marines are recalling and describing the purpose of the RCLF Program. This can inform future efforts on improving how CAOCL explains the program to Marines as well as designing curriculum and program policies.

Marines both in the survey and during interviews were asked what they understood to be the purpose of the RCLF Program. The themes that emerged were not unexpected and provide CAOCL some avenues to explore for future messaging and programmatic decisions.

- Regional emphasis

The regional component of the RCLF Program is well-recognized. Oftentimes, it is linked with the language component. Most, if not all, of the Marines who had heard about the program knew it involved learning about regions or specific cultures. Comments, such as "Train Marines on specific regions in the world"⁷, "To learn about different cultures and languages"⁸, "You get assigned a region so you can start to build a base knowledge and building into somewhat of a resident expert"⁹, "From my understanding, it is meant to focus on a geographic region and understand about the economy, the geography, all that. Everything important about the economy and the world. I thought it was great."¹⁰, provide insights into how Marines are thinking about this program.

⁷ Respondent #38, Staff Sergeant, RCLF Survey, August 2016.

⁸ Respondent #25, Second Lieutenant, RCLF Survey, August 2016.

⁹ Captain #13, researcher field notes from interview, ANGLICO, 23 September 2016.

¹⁰ Captain #15, interview, ANGLICO, 23 September 2016.

- Familiarization vs expertise of regional knowledge

At the RCLF Program's inception, CAOCL leadership was very intentional in including the word familiarization in the program title to mitigate the possibility that Marine leaders would expect regional experts from within the general purpose force as a result of RCLF participation. Now, CAOCL leadership wants to know how that titular intention has been interpreted by Marines. When hearing Marines explain the RCLF Program's purpose, it becomes evident that there is some confusion as to whether the RCLF Program develops regional expertise or is meant to familiarize the student with the region. Some think it is about developing regional subject matter experts. For example, one sergeant wrote, "My understanding is that I need to become a subject matter expert on my designated region."¹¹ A lieutenant colonel agreed in his entry in the survey, "I know that it is regional, and that it involves cultural training in that region. Marines studying that region can responsively be called to provide expertise."¹² A captain explained, "Not a lot of info about what it was, it's just one more requirement 'you will be looked at as a specialist in regions.' ... It's never been clear, other than that we're a smaller version of the FAO expert in that region."¹³ Others understand the intent to familiarize the force on regions and associated cultures. For example, one captain said, "that's the thing you do- where you're assigned a regional area and you have to be familiar with it."¹⁴ Another wrote about the purpose of the program, "in order to broaden the cultural understanding of regions for Marines at every level. It will create Marines who have a basic knowledge of specific regions and cultures."¹⁵ Interestingly, many of the Marines who referenced familiarization were captains, suggesting a messaging success at the captain level, or a maturation of understanding through programmatic exposure. The researchers posit that it may be more the latter, as that understanding is not universally shared at the higher ranks who have no program experience.

- Linked to deployment

One well understood message is that there is a link between the RCLF Program and deployments, that through the RCLF Program, Marines gain knowledge about specific regions so that the unit has that knowledge available in the event of a deployment to that region. "The purpose of the RCLF Program is to give Marines a familiarization of regions across the globe. Marines are assigned regions more or less randomly so that a unit has Marines who are familiar with different areas of the world in the case Marines are deployed [there]" notes one first lieutenant.¹⁶ A sergeant writes, "to learn about a region of the world where we might go to war with or be doing humanitarian aid in."¹⁷ One captain explains the purpose, "So we can be familiar with the basics of a region and have a little diversity around the Corps. 'This many have a better understanding of this geographic area' so if you go where you weren't [prepared to go], then we can get spun up. I would use RCLF if I were sent to the region."¹⁸

- Tool for the commander

This link to deployment feeds into another message: that Marines involved in the RCLF Program gain capabilities for a commander to leverage when deployed. This is something that Marines have heard but about

¹¹ Respondent #15, Sergeant, RCLF Survey, August 2016.

¹² Respondent #30, Lieutenant Colonel, RCLF Survey, August 2016.

¹³ Captain #13, researcher field notes from interview, ANGLICO, 23 September 2016.

¹⁴ Captain #18, researcher field notes from interview, ANGLICO, 25 September 2016.

¹⁵ Respondent #18, Captain, RCLF Survey, August 2016.

¹⁶ Respondent #47, First Lieutenant, RCLF Survey, August 2016.

¹⁷ Respondent #17, Sergeant, RCLF Survey, August 2016.

¹⁸ Captain #18, researcher field notes from interview, ANGLICO, 25 September 2016.

which they do not necessarily agree. As theorized, the RCLF Program needs commanders to leverage RCLF capabilities to realize the program vision; thus, this is a critical element for CAOCL leadership to consider. In the survey, respondents were asked what the intent was, and their responses suggest that the messaging on this front is working. One chief warrant officer 3 explained the program's purpose in the following words, "to provide the Force with personnel who have an understanding of specific geographical regions and cultures, which will serve as additional capabilities to unit commanders or small unit leaders."¹⁹ A lieutenant notes, "you're kind of more familiar with the area as an advisor to your higher ups – because they might not be. And they have somebody here that knows the area because they did their RCLF modules – so you can kinda be advising and more helpful in that sense."²⁰ A captain provides the intent as "to develop a resident cultural knowledge base at leadership ranks within the Marine Corps to call upon as the mission requires."²¹

However, when talking about this aspect, interviewees reveal discomfort with this expectation because of lack of retention and depth of knowledge. A sergeant who took the course three years ago said, "if something popped off, I'm not sure I'm the candidate that should be the designated person, 'a main person to teach it to others.' I did it three years ago. I would have to re-do the reading. I definitely would not feel comfortable passing to others."²² And a captain explained, "If a four-star [general] came to me for expertise in South Africa, then somewhere along the line we have failed [as the Marine Corps] because there should be an attaché or a FAO. I only know what I learned on MarineNet."²³ Offering his perspective as a commander, a different captain explained, "... as a commander, I don't see it as a tool for me. Somebody has regional training. ... I don't use it in a way, if so-and-so has a region, I'm not going to use them sort of as an expert on that. So yeah, the training doesn't drive me to seek out their advice on the culture."²⁴

- Quality spread of global capability

Marines in the study do not share a common understanding of the reason behind the regional assignments. Most understand the what – that they will be assigned a region – but not necessarily the why. Those who firmly link the RCLF Program with their immediate deployment needs or with deployment to their region tend to view the assignment process and, thus, the learning associated with it as somewhat arbitrary, which impacts the value they place on the learning. "It's random. ... I'm not going to use that ever in any way in my life. Middle East – I've been there three times."²⁵ This reveals how Marines may be thinking about the RCLF Program and the capabilities it provides them. While this sergeant says he understands the logic behind the assignment process, he explains, "I don't know when we'll deploy to West Africa. ... I don't understand the purpose of it as well as I should."²⁶ A lieutenant expressed confusion over the assignment process:

I mean, for mine, I was, I am... West South Asia, so it's like Afghanistan... Pakistan... and – you know, a couple more. But the – the one thing I found weird is that you're assigned it at TBS and you don't know what unit you're going with, where you're going to go, um and I don't know how it works for the SOI guy or like the, the Privates and PSUs if they're assigned that before they get assigned to a unit or what that is, but I feel like there should be more of a correlation between where you're going to go and where

¹⁹ Respondent #33, Chief Warrant Officer – 3, RCLF Survey, August 2016.

²⁰ Lieutenant, small group interview, Baker Company, 29 September 2016.

²¹ Respondent #3, Captain, RCLF Survey, August 2016.

²² Sergeant #44, interview and researcher field notes from interview, Headquarters Company, 21 September 2016.

²³ Captain #13, interview, ANGLICO, 23 September 2016.

²⁴ Captain #9, interview, Animal Company, 1 October 2016.

²⁵ Sergeant #44, interview and researcher field notes from interview, Headquarters Company, 21 September 2016.

²⁶ Ibid.

you're assigned.²⁷

The rationale for the assignment process is to elevate the Marine Corps' understanding of all parts of the world, not just those the Corps routinely engages, so as to heighten preparedness for the unexpected. There were only a couple who understood the assignment process in this way. As one captain explained, "the value of RCLF in general is an institutional knowledge base for all these regions. There was a void in the past, but successive generations will be institutionalized with it. It will snowball in a positive way."²⁸ A lieutenant agreed, "There might be a 'Black Swan,' and we can't [have] everyone in the USMC learning about the Middle East – making sure it's spread-loaded."²⁹

- Culture general concepts and skills

The message about instilling in Marines transferable cultural concepts and skills that can be used in any operating environment or to improve intercultural exchange is not well understood. This understanding is largely absent from the Marines' descriptions of the program. For the most part, participants see the RCLF Program as a program to learn about regions, specific cultures, and associated languages and link that learning to specific deployment locations. As one sergeant explained, "I would think if you teach, like French Polynesia, if you taught me that and I went to Iraq or Africa, it's kind of like – well, now, I'm a little lost because I didn't learn about this, on top of, I didn't use that, so I'm going to forget it."³⁰ There were a couple of Marines who had an expanded understanding of the program that seemed to incorporate the conceptual transferability and global applicability. For instance, when asked how to characterize the program for younger Marines, a sergeant said he would tell them, "it's something that can get you ready for anything. I would definitely tell them it's a very long course, but there's a lot of information you may find useful. You never know."³¹ A surveyed lieutenant offered the following response to the program purpose question: "The purpose is to teach Marines how to understand the dynamics of what makes up a group of people. Marines learn about a specific region that they are assigned to, but the greater purpose is to enable Marines to understand why culture in general is important [and] what comprises it."³²

- Use of MarineNet

Currently, as the vehicle to provide online learning to the force, MarineNet is the learning platform Marines engage when involved with the RCLF Program. The use of MarineNet is sending a message to Marine students, and that message is negative. Use of MarineNet was not a specific question area; however, many interviewees provided commentary on its use and what it conveys to them about the value the Marine Corps and Marines place on the materials. One captain explained, "the culture in the Marine Corps with MarineNet is like 'I need to do it to get it done.' That's the unfortunate thing. ... MarineNet is sort of this thing that, this beast that Marines use to click and move on with their lives, and we treat it like that unfortunately."³³ A sergeant stated, "Nobody is on MarineNet to learn"³⁴, rather they are there to check the box and regurgitate information on the test because they need to get it out of the way.³⁵ Another lieutenant said:

²⁷ One of three lieutenants, small group interview, 16 September 2016 at Marine Corps MAGTF Training Center, 29 Palms.

²⁸ Captain #22, interview, Baker Company, 29 September 2016.

²⁹ Lieutenant #37, researcher field notes from interview, Headquarters Company, 21 September 2016.

³⁰ Sergeant #11, interview, Animal Company, 1 October 2016.

³¹ Sergeant #16, interview, ANGLICO, 23 September 2016.

³² Respondent #22, Lieutenant, RCLF Survey, August 2016.

³³ Captain #9, interview, Animal Company, 1 October 2016.

³⁴ Sergeant #26, interview, Baker Company, 29 September 2016.

³⁵ Sergeant #26, researcher field notes from interview, Baker Company, 29 September 2016.

MarineNet equals bad? Yeah. ... and it all facilitates the check in the box hit list mentality of – the command is going to provide the Company or the platoons with a list of names that need to complete CAOCL training or tobacco cessation training on MarineNet. And the goal is just to make that hit list go away. ... So the Marines are going to hop on and they're going to knock it out, just like they do their annual training, which they also don't think is important. So that, that doesn't, that will make the hit list go away, but it won't actually accomplish the mission.³⁶

Marines conflate the RCLF Program with other annual training requirements they complete through MarineNet and express that they expect to just click through the curriculum to “knock it out.”³⁷ The message Marines are reporting to receive as a result of CAOCL's programmatic decision to use MarineNet is recognized by CAOCL leaders but, nevertheless, unintended. While outside the span of control of CAOCL, CAOCL leadership may want to consider ways to mitigate the impact of this message on Marines' perception of program value.

- RCLF as a career-long education program

The message of RCLF as a career-long education program is two-fold – both “career-long” and “education” are embedded themes. The idea that the RCLF Program spans a career is not explicit in most Marines' responses and interviews, but there seems to be a sense of lasting connection *to their assigned regions*, in that they understand they need to study the region to develop expertise or understanding. This can be seen in this captain's explanation of program intent, “you get assigned a region so you can start to build a base knowledge and building into somewhat of a resident expert.”³⁸ The unknown timing of when they will be called upon to use this knowledge can suggest understanding of the career-long relationship with the materials, captured in this surveyed sergeant's words, “The purpose of the program is to become somewhat of a subject matter expert for a region so that when needed someone would be able to have information on it.”³⁹ However, there is a sense when reviewing the words of Marines who had participated in the initial block of instruction (the 12 modules⁴⁰) that that was the RCLF Program to them. For example, one captain who had finished his South Africa modules several years back said, “There needs to be something that refreshes time to time. You could space out the modules and blocks so it's a continuous learn and refresh versus ‘knock it out.’”⁴¹ For the most part, there was no recognition of follow-on courses beyond the 12 modules, except in the case of one sergeant who noted, “I'll forget it all by Block 4.”⁴² While not very affirming, it does show understanding of program continuation. One individual, a captain, clearly articulated the career long nature of the program. When discussing the intent of the program, he explained, “at a minimum, Marines are more culturally aware and each Marine is assigned a region and then throughout their career they develop sort of a continued learning in that region. That understanding of culture, language and things of that nature.”⁴³ This was the only direct link to an understanding of RCLF's career-long intent in the data.

The discussion on education is more ambiguous. The message that this is a learning program is clearly

³⁶ Lieutenant #10, interview, Animal Company, 1 October 2016.

³⁷ Captain #13, interview, ANGLICO, 23 September 2016; Lieutenant #10, interview, Animal Company, 1 October 2016; Lieutenant #19, interview, ANGLICO, 25 September 2016; Lieutenant #37, interview, Headquarters Company, 21 September 2016; and Sergeant #44, interview, Headquarters Company, 21 September 2016.

³⁸ Captain #13, researcher field notes from interview, ANGLICO, 23 September 2016.

³⁹ Respondent #30, Sergeant, RCLF Survey, August 2016.

⁴⁰ As originally designed, the curriculum for Officer Block 2 (for lieutenants/warrant officers 1 and 2 and Enlisted Block 3 (for sergeants) involved an introductory module on Operational Culture and the Five Dimensions and 12 modules of content on assigned regions. CAOCL retired this version of the curriculum in September 2016.

⁴¹ Captain #13, researcher field notes from interview, ANGLICO, 23 September 2016.

⁴² Sergeant #44, researcher field notes from interview, Headquarters Company, 21 September 2016.

⁴³ Captain #9, interview, Animal Company, 1 October 2016.

understood. In both the survey and in interviews, Marines associate the RCLF Program with ideas like learning, gaining understanding or awareness, familiarizing, and broadening knowledge. However, most of the Marines in the study are explaining the program in language more associated with training and predeployment cultural training, in particular. They see this program as a means to satisfy an immediate need for cultural information about a deployment location rather than an education program designed to instill thinking processes and conceptual understanding. Comments like, “all the useful information in the RCLF classes is given to us in a pre deployment [sic] brief”⁴⁴, “to know what not to do so you don’t offend”⁴⁵, and “get same info from RSO”⁴⁶, reveal how Marines are approaching and thinking about the RCLF content and how they are perceiving its use and usefulness. The regional and deployment emphases in the RCLF message promote this understanding. This becomes important when examining the value students place on this program.

There were a couple of Marines who understood the transformative nature of the RCLF education. As one captain explains:

What you do gain institutionally is you’ve forced a certain level of exposure and education. And with some people it is going to stick, right? And they will pursue it of their own volition a little bit more – and then you do have that person who can come back to the operating forces and then provide context to the greater masses. I’m not sure you can institutionalize that level of care and interest in the way that maybe we have care and interest in combined arms exercises – but I think what you do gain is now you have all these officers who have to do it, and just by virtue of that – a higher percentage of people are then going to do the R-CLF and then, ‘oh wow, this interests me, I’m going to continue pursuing this on my own, and then maybe become a little bit more of a duty expert,’ because it’s so hard to become an expert on culture, unless you spend a lot of time, there, but I think you’ll make gains in that area.⁴⁷

A lieutenant, while expressing confusion about how the Marine Corps uses “the RCLF thing to do anything” and “what the Marine Corps gets out of the program if it doesn’t actively seek to put those people with the education into positions to apply it,” does see that the Corps will get a “general amorphous gain of ‘we have culturally aware people all over’.” However, he continues, “I don’t know what ... you actually gain from that.”⁴⁸ A captain offers, “the Marines having to go through it, and at least getting some, soooooome, soooooome exposure to different cultures, at least on paper, I think is a good start.”⁴⁹

- RCLF as a PME requirement

As approved by the Marine Requirements Oversight Council in 2012, the RCLF Program is to be a requirement to be considered PME complete for promotion. There has been a delay in implementing this requirement due to the staffing process of an updated USMC PME order. It is now likely to become a requirement in 2018.

Several Marines understood the RCLF Program to be required to be considered PME complete for promotion. This may be because original messaging included reference to the requirement. “Mandatory for lieutenants”⁵⁰ was what one lieutenant heard at TBS. Another sergeant explained, “The master sergeant gathered all the enlisted Marines and told us that RCLF was just implemented, and I was just on the bubble of it being required – October 1, 2012. The master sergeant told us that we would be learning about different regions and going

⁴⁴ Respondent #16, Sergeant, RCLF Survey, August 2016.

⁴⁵ Sergeant #45, interview, Headquarters Company, 22 September 2016.

⁴⁶ Sergeant #25, researcher field notes from interview, Baker Company, 29 September 2016.

⁴⁷ Captain #22, interview, Baker Company, 29 September 2016.

⁴⁸ Lieutenant #10, interview, Animal Company, 1 October 2016.

⁴⁹ Captain #9, interview, Animal Company, 1 October 2016.

⁵⁰ Lieutenant #19, researcher field notes from interview, ANGLICO, 25 September 2016.

over culture and geography. His main point is that we needed it to get promoted.”⁵¹ Three of the nine surveyed who had completed their RCLF rank-aligned instruction indicated the aspect of its being a promotion requirement motivated them to complete it. Once it became clear that the policy update process was going to take longer, CAOCL messaging changed to inform Marines that completion will be required in the future. However, some Marines have not heard that message, such as one captain who wondered if the talk of requirement was “just a scare tactic,” as his peers who had not completed their RCLF instruction for rank still got promoted.⁵² This most likely is because of the timing of their engagement with RCLF materials.

There is an unintended message about the promotion requirement, however. It links to the other unintended message about the use of MarineNet and to how Marines are talking about RCLF education using training language. As noted in the section on MarineNet, some Marines perceive RCLF learning as just another required training on MarineNet. In their thinking, the requirement places it on the list of annual training requirements to be monitored and checked off by the command. Interestingly, not one Marine referenced RCLF learning in terms of PME distance learning. It is possible that modifying messaging so that there is a greater emphasis on education will mitigate this perception. Regardless, RCLF beyond MarineNet is not a possibility in the near future.

Discussion

Is the awareness campaign working? Basic level awareness is present. Most of the Marines in this project have heard of the RCLF Program. Among officers, there is much more consistent awareness than among enlisted Marines, which suggests a need for a more concerted, consistent effort to engage all ranks, especially staff sergeants and above. Five interviewees did not understand the acronym or title of the program or pronounced the acronym differently, but they did recognize it once the interviewer started explaining, for instance, “Oh, I know about that. I have Central Asia.”⁵³ As this is the early stages of implementation and program socialization, this should be expected. However, it warrants monitoring over time, as CAOCL leadership will want to see this lessening as the program matures.

When it comes to deeper awareness of programmatic intent, these data reveal a need for CAOCL leadership to rethink the content of CAOCL’s messaging. Marines understand that they are assigned a region and that they are supposed to learn about the region in case of a deployment change or a commander call for assistance in mission preparation. The words used to explain the RCLF Program and programmatic processes are influencing Marines to think about the learning and to value it in certain ways. Both CAOCL’s narrative and curriculum use words that convey a strong link between the assigned region and deployment. CAOCL structurally (CAOCL staffing and data reporting) and procedurally (regional assignment and curriculum coding) reinforces this understanding. The regional assignment process itself influences how Marines consume RCLF content. Since Marines are regionally focused in their deployments, they appear to conflate RCLF regional assignments with predeployment training. This kind of thinking can impact the ability of the program to achieve its long-term educational and transformative goal.

In this and prior CAOCL research, it is clear that Marines value the “dos and don’ts.” At a minimum, Marines turn to CAOCL seeking perishable, immediate-use knowledge of a deployment location. This makes sense given the predeployment training frame where most Marines encounter CAOCL. At times, this leads Marines to

⁵¹ Sergeant #16, interview, ANGLICO, 23 September 2016.

⁵² Captain #13, researcher field notes from interview, ANGLICO, 23 September 2016.

⁵³ Sergeant #45, interview, Headquarters Company, 22 September 2016.

think the RCLF learning is repetitive of the predeployment work-up and, thus, “useless,”⁵⁴ as more often than not there is no alignment between their deployment location and regional assignment. Those who understand the longer vision of spread-loading regional knowledge still only see the value in the regional content and its site-specific usefulness. If Marines are not going to the specific area, they are struggling with understanding the value of the learning. It will be hard for them to counter the young corporal’s perception of program value, “If I’m not going to a region, then I don’t want to learn about it.”⁵⁵ The program is understood as a program about the “other,” or other cultures, rather than about understanding the dynamics of culture and how that understanding can inform intercultural exchange, decision making, and problem solving.

How this looks in action: if a deployment location changes, the RCLF message is that a commander can call upon Marines who are assigned that region to help with planning. This is good, as having some background in the area is useful and may not be readily available. However, there is another value of the RCLF Program. Marines are also gaining transferable cultural concepts and skills, alternative ways to problem solve, application of lessons learned from other areas of the world, and the ability to access and critically consume information, etc., which can actually be more valuable in the long run, as they involve high level thinking skills, not basic information recall. The commander needs both: Marines who can do the former (use higher order thinking skills) with the latter (information). However, this higher order thinking is not prioritized in the RCLF message as it currently is delivered.

And Marines, especially the ones who are to be the tools for the commander, are concerned for two reasons. First, they are concerned that they will be expected to recall the details after one RCLF block of instruction that they may have taken years ago. Again, the detailed information is what they have been told is valuable. The tool for commander message is challenging for them due to retention concerns. A couple of Marines noted the long periods between blocks or since completing blocks and the inability to review the material once completing the class as undermining their ability to be useful if called upon. Marines can now revisit RCLF materials and seek additional information through the mobile application, which may alleviate some of these concerns. This also may identify a gap in program messaging – the need for self-study in the interim – that may warrant some attention.

Second, they are concerned that they will be expected to be useful (“tools”) with the basic knowledge gained through the initial block of instruction. If they are to be tools for their commander, it will be during the time they are lower in rank and have completed one or two blocks of instruction. This gets at the familiarization versus expertise discussion above. In their thinking, they may be a tool for the commander by the time *they* are the commander, meaning after they have been exposed to the career long curriculum and have had time to cultivate a certain level of learning. They do not feel they are learning enough (frequency or content) to be useful at the lower ranks. Again, the program’s intent is familiarization. There is no way they can offer what foreign area officers and the intelligence shop can bring at this stage of learning. A captain, when asked about being a tool for the commander, asks “My first question – don’t we have FAOs?”⁵⁶ This may prompt CAOCL leadership to think about evolving the program message. Wrapping the purpose of RCLF in the commander toolbox without providing a different orientation, e.g. one that emphasizes transferable concepts and skills and higher order thinking, could be a problem for being able to explain or achieve future success. It also could open discussions in the future about curricular design and delivery. CAOCL leadership may need to explore different curricular content and potentially delivery methods if the Marine Corps wants lower ranks to be tools for

⁵⁴ Respondent #16, Sergeant, RCLF Survey, August 2016.

⁵⁵ Corporal #35, interview, Baker Company, 29 September 2016.

⁵⁶ Captain #13, researcher field notes from interview, ANGLICO, 23 September 2016.

commander. Currently, CAOCL is structurally and resource constrained to its present solution; however, efforts underway with curricular revision may address some of these concerns. Routine and targeted data collection with Marines over time will help determine if these concerns are addressed.

Throughout the data, Marines are trying to create a cohesive message to explain how they are to think about training and education in culture; however, they are limited to the language provided, which tends to be encased in a short-term vision (utility is for a deployment to the assigned region). This vision supports the predeployment preparation model well. However, the RCLF Program was built with a longer term vision, and the program is challenged by this disconnect between message and program theory. Both approaches are needed by Marines and provided by CAOCL. Teaching Marines how to think about cultural concepts, skills, and content through education will make them better consumers of the detailed content they need and receive before deploying. Providing Marines the language to explain CAOCL programs throughout the training and education continuum will help Marine value and use the learning to the maximum effect.

Recommendations

Below are the researchers' recommendations for consideration based on their findings.

1) Basic Level Awareness

- a. Enhance CAOCL's web presence. Marines reported seeking information from online sources.
 - i. Adding links to RCLF MARADMINs and other RCLF-related policy (such as the USMC PME order, when available) and programmatic documents would ensure accessibility and visibility of those documents.
 - ii. Work with MCU's information technology department to optimize CAOCL's webpage for Google and other search engines so that CAOCL can rise in Google and other search engines' search results.
 - iii. Based on the results of reframing the RCLF message, update both the text and the visuals to accurately present RCLF Program intent. Currently, it overemphasizes the regional component both in language and visuals.
- b. Address the gap in enlisted program awareness.
 - i. Work with EPME to ensure consistent engagement across the Sergeant's Courses to provide a TBS-like kickoff event for enlisted Marines. Where there are no CAOCL liaison officers or they are not available, consider other ways to deliver the program brief, such as via video.
 1. If such a video is created, recommend also attaching it to the website and CAOCL's Facebook page.
 - ii. In the event of ACE accreditation, recommend making a video for release on Marine TV channels informing Marines about the overall program and the new opportunity for credit.
 - iii. Explore opportunities to reach senior enlisted in a consistent way. There are SPME courses and senior enlisted gatherings that may present opportunities for engagement. If CAOCL is successful in gaining ACE accreditation for the RCLF Program, this will be something that the enlisted leadership will be very much interested in, especially in light of the 7 February 2017-released CMC education tasks that impact enlisted Marines.

2) Deeper Level Understanding

- a. Reframe the RCLF message away from the regional-deployment construct to emphasize more long-term educational learning that incorporates the value of transferable culture general

concepts and skills, exercised in different regional contexts, to prepare all Marines, not just those in specialized billets, to navigate the cultural complexities of their future planned and unexpected missions.

- i. The current construct is leading Marines to think about the RCLF Program as an extension of the predeployment culture training (a short-term vision) and value only the perishable regional content, which is undermining their value of the program, creating concern in them in terms of their ability to support the commander and future deployments, and silencing a major component of the program.
 - ii. The language needs to be clear and deliberate and needs to address all the sources of concern, including use of MarineNet. While not optimal, MarineNet is what CAOCL has to use at this point. Being upfront with Marines' perceptions of the medium will help lessen the impact.
 - iii. Address the regional assignment process through management language. Use intentional words to convey the purpose of the quality spread of regional knowledge familiarization. It is not to prepare for the known or the immediate, but rather to heighten preparedness for the unexpected. Use of "link to deployment" currently is shaping thinking toward the known and immediate and reinforcing the training mindset; recommend limiting that.
- b. Link the RCLF Program to other PME distance education programs and platforms to help Marines frame this learning as part of the PME continuum and not as a part of a predeployment training program. For example, on the MCU website, the RCLF Program is not listed under PME distance education programs, and those that are listed are subsumed under the College of Distance Education and Training, not recognizing CAOCL's stake in the game.
 - c. Consider how CAOCL's organizational structure and practices (e.g. staffing expertise, team construct, current RCLF data reporting, curriculum coding, etc.) may be contributing to some of these challenges and seek ways to lessen their influence.
 - d. Create a cohesive message about CAOCL's activities throughout the training and education continuum. This will help Marines better understand how to consume and use CAOCL-provided learning. Permeate this understanding throughout CAOCL so that CAOCL liaison officers and subject matter experts are equally comfortable discussing RCLF and operational culture briefs. Ensure that CAOCL educational materials reference CAOCL predeployment training and vice versa.
- 3) Revisit this research area in two to three years to track trends over time.