Noncommissioned Officer Education System (NCOES): Considerations for Testing-out and Awarding Equivalent Credit

**Richard L. Wampler and
Paul N. Blankenbeckler**
Northrop Grumman Corporation

**United States Army Research Institute
for the Behavioral and Social Sciences**

November 2008

**U.S. Army Research Institute
for the Behavioral and Social Sciences**

**A Directorate of the Department of the Army
Deputy Chief of Staff, G1**

Authorized and approved for distribution:

BARBARA A. BLACK, Ph.D.   **MICHELLE SAMS, Ph.D.**
Research Program Manager   **Director**
**Training and Leader Development
    Division**

Technical review by

Kenneth L. Evans, U.S. Army Research Institute
Kathleen A. Quinkert, U.S. Army Research Institute

NOTICES

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

1. REPORT DATE (dd-mm-yy) November 2008	2. REPORT TYPE Final	3. DATES COVERED (from. . . to) March - September 2008

4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Noncommissioned Officer Education System (NCOES): Considerations for Testing-out and Awarding Equivalent Credit	5a. CONTRACT OR GRANT NUMBER W74V8H-04-D-0045 (DO 0027)
	5b. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER 665803

6. AUTHOR(S) Richard L. Wampler and Paul N. Blankenbeckler (Northrop Grumman Corporation)	5c. PROJECT NUMBER D730
	5d. TASK NUMBER 382
	5e. WORK UNIT NUMBER

7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)
 	
Northrop Grumman Corporation   US Army Research Institute for the
3565 Macon Road   Behavioral and Social Sciences
Columbus, GA 31907   ARI-Ft Benning Research Unit
                              P. O. Box 52086
                              Fort Benning, GA 31995-2086
	8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER

9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) U. S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral & Social Sciences ATTN: DAPE-ARI-IJ 2511 Jefferson Davis Highway Arlington, VA 22202-3926	10. MONITOR ACRONYM ARI
	11. MONITOR REPORT NUMBER Study Report 2009-05

12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Approved for public release; distribution is unlimited.

13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES

Subject matter POC and Contracting Officer's Representative (COR): Dr. Kenneth L. Evans

14. ABSTRACT *(Maximum 200 words)*: This research examined the viability of allowing noncommissioned officers (NCOs) to receive NCO Education System (NCOES) credit based on experience or testing-out. Surveys and interviews were completed with 164 participants, varying in rank from Lieutenant Colonel to Staff Sergeant. Participants were serving in duty positions ranging from U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command School Leaders and staff to actual NCO and Officer course instructors, at six Army installations representing 11 Schools. The majority (58%) agreed that testing-out of selected NCOES content is a viable option and 61% agreed that no credit should be awarded solely for experience. An overwhelming majority (90%) agreed that all NCOs should attend some resident NCOES classes to foster interpersonal relationships, 86% agreed that testing-out should include both hands-on and written components, and 85% agreed that all NCOs, active and reserve, should be handled the same concerning testing-out or receiving equivalent credit. Perspectives differed by rank group and duty position. Participants identified numerous educational, administrative, logistical, and sociological items that could be negatively impacted by testing-out. They also suggested some testing-out procedures that might mitigate potential impacts.

15. SUBJECT TERMS

NCO Education System   NCOES   BNCOC   ANCOC   Equivalent Credit   Testing

SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF			19. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	20. NUMBER OF PAGES	21. RESPONSIBLE PERSON Diane Hadjiosif Technical Publication Specialist 703-602-8047
16. REPORT Unclassified	17. ABSTRACT Unclassified	18. THIS PAGE Unclassified	Unlimited	55	

i

Study Report 2009-05

Noncommissioned Officer Education System (NCOES): Considerations for Testing-out and Awarding Equivalent Credit

Richard L. Wampler and Paul N. Blankenbeckler
Northrop Grumman Corporation

ARI – Ft Benning Research Unit
Scott E. Graham, Chief

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

NONCOMMISSIONED OFFICER EDUCATION SYSTEM (NCOES): CONSIDERATIONS
FOR TESTING-OUT AND AWARDING EQUIVALENT CREDIT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Research Requirement:

World events since September 2001 have exacerbated the ability of many
Noncommissioned Officers (NCOs) to attend institutional NCO Education System (NCOES)
courses at the most appropriate points in their professional military careers. Additionally, the
Army has raised its expectations of the NCO Corps, increasing its overall role and scope of
responsibility. As a result, a growing number of NCOs are assuming duty positions for which
they have not been formally trained. In response to these developments, the U.S. Army Training
and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) is developing a new NCO Development Strategy that will
meet force generation time windows and will establish a train-ahead approach to providing
NCOs with the skills they need before their duty positions call for them to be used. One possible
component of this strategy is to award NCOES credit to NCOs based on experience or testing.

Procedure:

Surveys were completed and interviews were conducted with 164 participants across six
Army installations between May and July 2008. Participants represented 11 TRADOC Schools.
They ranged in rank from Lieutenant Colonel to Staff Sergeant and held duty positions varying
from TRADOC School and NCO Academy (NCOA) leadership and staff to small group
instructors for both NCO and Officer courses. Surveys and interviews solicited opinions on
whether some form of equivalent credit or testing-out program should be implemented in lieu of
resident NCOES. If a program was to be implemented, what were the major areas that could be
impacted and what procedures could be used to administer testing-out.

Findings:

Participants expressed strong agreement on certain aspects of testing-out and awarding
NCOES course credit. The majority (58%) agreed that testing-out of selected NCOES content is
a viable option, but each School Proponent must revise NCOES course content to make all
material relevant and challenging before determining which classes should be allowed for
testing-out. A majority (61%) agreed that no credit should be awarded solely for experience. An
overwhelming majority (90%) agreed that all NCOs should attend some resident NCOES classes
to foster interpersonal relationships. If testing-out is implemented, 86% agreed that testing-out
should include both hands-on and written components. An overwhelming majority (85%) agreed
that all NCOs, active and reserve, should be handled the same concerning testing-out or
receiving equivalent credit. While there was general agreement for most items, perspectives
differed by rank group and duty position. Participants identified numerous educational,
administrative, logistical, and sociological items that could be negatively impacted by testing-
out. They also suggested some testing-out procedures that might mitigate potential impacts.

Utilization and Dissemination of Findings:

The findings and suggestions offered by participants should help guide TRADOC efforts to develop a new NCO Development Strategy. Any program that involves testing-out or awarding equivalent credit for NCOES course content can benefit from addressing the potential impacts identified in this report and considering the testing recommendations provided by participants. The results of this research were briefed to TRADOC G-3/5/7 representatives on September 23, 2008.

NONCOMMISSIONED OFFICER EDUCATION SYSTEM (NCOES): CONSIDERATIONS FOR TESTING-OUT AND AWARDING EQUIVALENT CREDIT

CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

CONTENTS (continued)

Introduction

The need for training programs for Noncommissioned Officers (NCOs) to develop their professionalism and prepare them as leaders can be traced back to the Prussian officer von Steuben and General George Washington in the early days of forming the Continental Army (Elder, 1999). While the NCO development program has evolved throughout the Army's history, the roots of the NCO Education System (NCOES) of today began in the late 1960s. The Army Chief of Staff directed a study be conducted to determine how best to manage the career progression of enlisted Soldiers. Project Proficiency recommended formal leadership training for NCOs which included a three-level NCO Education Development Concept, similar to the officer education program. The report identified that:

> The present haphazard system of career development, as opposed to skill development, had two bad results. First, the image of the NCO as a professional, highly trained individual is difficult to foster; second, the Army's resource of intelligent enlisted men, anxious to develop as career Soldiers, is inefficiently managed. The Army has extended great effort to ensure the selected development of its officers. Analagous [sic] effort should be spent in the development of the noncommissioned officer. (Elder, 1999, Project Proficiency, para 2)

In 1971, as the Army was moving to an all volunteer force, General Westmoreland, then Chief of Staff of the Army, urged commanders of major commands to expand education for NCOs, to include affording them the opportunity to attend NCO academies (Elder, 1999). As the modern NCOES continued to form in the 1970's the Army's Enlisted Personnel Management System formally tied NCOES course attendance to pay grades and promotions (Elder, 1999). Army Regulation 600-200 published in February 1981 specified the linkage between NCOES attendance and promotion eligibility for the different NCO ranks (Department of the Army, 1981). While NCOES course attendance was mandated for NCO promotion, units frequently had to balance sending NCOs to schools against their operational requirements. This system, with various modifications and changes, remained in effect for two decades.

World events since September 2001, when terrorists attacked key points in the United States, have placed high priority demands on the Army. This situation has exacerbated the ability of many NCOs to attend institutional NCOES courses at the most appropriate points in their professional military careers. In fact, in recognition of the difficulty of having NCOs attend NCOES courses and the negative impact on promotions, in November 2003, the Military Personnel Center (MILPER) issued a message stating the NCOES requirements for promotion would be suspended effective January 1, 2004. The policy would continue until further notice (Department of the Army, 2003). Over the next few years MILPER issued other messages addressing waivers based on the linkage between NCOES attendance and promotions. The intent was to ensure "that no Soldier is otherwise disadvantaged, due to an extended deployment, for a promotion opportunity" (Department of the Army, 2005, paragraph 5).

To meet deployment requirements in the post-2001 era, the Army developed a model to ensure sufficient units were trained and ready. The Army Force Generation (ARFORGEN) process outlines the structured plan for preparing trained and cohesive units for future missions

over a three-year cycle. While some variations appear, the ARFORGEN process is depicted and explained in an addendum to the Army Posture Statement for both 2007 and 2008 (Department of the Army, 2007 & 2008a). It is worth noting that each Posture Statement was signed by a different Secretary of the Army and Army Chief of Staff, yet both explicitly address the need and importance of training NCOs. The importance is very clear since leader development, including institutional courses for NCOs, is listed as the second priority among four in the Executive Summary of the 2007 Posture Statement (Department of the Army, 2007). The 2008 Posture Statement identifies leader training and development as one of the compelling needs for FY09. The document even includes an Information Paper that explains the importance of the NCOES to the Army (Department of the Army, 2008a).

In April 2008, the Army published its latest guidance concerning NCOES attendance and promotion. Army Regulation 600-8-19 stipulates, "…Soldiers otherwise eligible for consideration but lacking the prerequisite level of NCOES as a direct result of operational deployment conflicts, or inability of the Army to schedule the course, will be granted a waiver of the NCOES requirement…" (Department of the Army, 2008b, section 1-27, p. 9). While the need to train NCOs is a recognized priority and promotion is still tied to NCOES attendance, the Army does not want to impede NCO promotion due to operational demands for deployment.

Additionally, the Army has raised its expectations of the NCO Corps, increasing the NCO role and scope of responsibility in world wide deployments. As a result, a growing number of NCOs are assuming duty positions for which they have not been formally trained. In response to these developments, the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) is developing a new NCO Development Strategy that will support the ARFORGEN time windows and establish a train-ahead approach to providing NCOs with the skills they need before their duty positions call for them to be used. Even though exact words and phrases have changed over time, the general purpose of the NCOES remains:
- To build NCO self confidence
- To increase tactical and technical competence in preparation for higher levels of responsibility
- To inculcate the values of the professional Army ethic.

One potential component of the new NCO Development Strategy is to consider the prior experience and knowledge of individual NCOs, in order to better tailor existing institutional courses to an increasingly diverse set of educational needs. For example, it might prove worthwhile to grant credit for NCOES content that has already been mastered, based on a careful consideration of an individual's prior experience and knowledge. It might also prove feasible to allow NCOs with significant prior experience and knowledge to reduce their time spent in institutional training. In any event, an investigation is needed to determine the feasibility and to identify the major implications of implementing these kinds of multi-track course options within the NCOES.

Purpose and Scope

In a memorandum for record, the Leader Development and Education Directorate at TRADOC requested that the U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social

Sciences (ARI) assist in investigating various methods to award NCOES credit based on an individual's knowledge and experience (see Appendix **B**). The primary objective of the research was to explore the feasibility of using individuals' prior experience and knowledge to better tailor NCOES training programs. If determined to be feasible, the next segment of this effort was to identify the major educational, logistical, and sociological implications of implementing multi-track course options. A major factor was to assess how implementation might impact the TRADOC Schools, the NCOES courses, the professionalism of NCOs, and the Army as a whole. Finally, based on the findings, the intent was to identify the next steps toward implementation. The research was to examine the implications from differing perspectives and a diverse population of those who might be most impacted by changes to the NCOES program.

As an overarching guide, TRADOC personnel identified three key questions to be investigated during the research and data collection. These questions served as the basis for determining the organization and content of the data collected for this effort.

- Is allowing an NCO to test-out of selected NCOES content a viable option?
- What are the implications for both the individual and other NCOs if we allow more experienced NCOs to test-out of parts of an NCOES course?
- What are the best practices for administering testing-out to mitigate potential cheating?

Related Research Concerning NCO Testing and Promotion

In a project called *Soldier Characteristics of the 21st Century (Soldier 21)*, ARI investigated the potential knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs) for future Soldiers. This was followed by *Maximizing 21st Century Noncommissioned Officers Performance (NCO 21)*, which attempted to identify and validate indicators of the KSAs that could be used in deciding junior NCO promotions. The major research effort continued with a 3-year program entitled *Performance Measures for 21st Century Soldiers Assessment (PerformM21)*. PerformM21 involved developing prototype assessments and a variety of assessment strategies that might be employed in deciding NCO promotions (Campbell, Knapp & Heffner, 2005).

Results of these efforts provided insights that were considered in this current research. Campbell, Knapp, and Heffner (2002) identified tools to measure job performance and to predict performance at the next higher grade level. While some measures were suggested as counseling tools to guide and influence NCO behavior, they suggested certain measures would best be applied in conjunction with NCOES. As a result of exploring the use of performance rating scales for NCOs, Knapp, Heffner, and Campbell (2003) noted that when commanders recommend NCOs for promotion, they generally award all possible points. This does not provide for distinction among the group of NCOs and demonstrates that commanders will show favoritism toward the personnel in their command. Following the PerformM21 project, Moriarty and Knapp (2007) offered some results and lessons learned that could be helpful in implementing an NCO test program. Multiple test methods (e.g., multiple choice, situational judgment, hands-on) provide a more comprehensive and accurate assessment of competence as compared to a single testing method. Parallel forms of tests would be necessary to allow for retesting and to help maintain test security. Finally, while Internet-delivery of tests is feasible, technology will remain fallible; be prepared for problems (e.g., data loss) due to imperfect Internet connections.

Method

The initial step was to identify a representative target population so feedback obtained could be interpreted as applicable to the entire Army. Two key factors were considered; which Army installations included the variety of branches and specialties that provided a cross-section for the Army, and which personnel at these installations had the most relevant knowledge and experience to offer informed recommendations concerning the future direction of NCOES.

A combined survey and interview method was used to obtain objective and subjective input from a diverse population from May through July 2008. The intent was to allow each participant to provide quantifiable responses in a structured survey without bias from other participants. Details are in the Survey Instrument section below. Following completion of the survey form, participants took part in an interview to discuss a selection of questions and topics related to testing-out and equivalent credit. These interviews provided more subjective input and could address details not contained in the survey. As a general rule, surveys and interviews with the more senior participants (e.g. Commanders and Commandants) were conducted individually while instructors and staff members completed the survey individually then took part in a group interview session. Because some interviews were conducted in a one-on-one session, the discussion allowed individuals to elaborate on survey responses and provide specific examples to substantiate their input to the survey. In some cases, a small group of two to seven participants completed the survey individually, then participated in a group interview together. These group discussions allowed all participants to offer additional input, to express differing opinions, and to build on points made by others.

Participating Installations

The six Army installations selected for participation in data collection provided a mix of TRADOC Centers and Schools that spanned various combat arms and support branches (specialties). Table 1 lists the Centers and their subordinate Schools for each of the installations.

Table 1
Centers and Schools that Participated in Data Collection

Installation	Center	School
Fort Benning, GA		Infantry School
Fort Jackson, SC	Soldier Support Institute	Adjutant General School
		Chaplain School
		Finance School
		Recruiter School
Fort Knox, KY		Armor School
Fort Lee, VA	Combined Arms Support Command	Quartermaster School
Fort Leonard Wood, MO	Maneuver Support Center	Military Police School
		Engineer School
		Chemical School
Fort Sill, OK		Artillery School

Survey Instrument

Using the focus questions provided by TRADOC, a survey instrument was developed to capture quantifiable individual feedback from participants. The survey is provided at Appendix A. In order to assess feedback from different groups of participants with varied experiences, biographical information collected in the survey included rank, branch or military occupational specialty (MOS), duty position, time in service, time in current position, previous assignments, prior training experience, and combat deployments.

The initial part of the survey solicited either participant agreement or disagreement with several items addressing whether the Army should grant NCOES credit to NCOs based on some form of testing or previous experience, including credit for an entire course or selected classes. These questions addressed both "testing-out" and "equivalent credit" for experience, with some specific items concerning implementation of testing-out and various options for awarding equivalent credit.

Subsequent parts of the survey focused on the potential and perceived impact, either positive or negative, of the Army implementing some form of testing-out or equivalent credit options. Questions addressed three major areas that could be impacted:

- Educational
  - o Verifying that NCOs opting out of a course or block of training possess the required knowledge to successfully continue their military career and to contribute in positions of increased responsibility
  - o Ensuring that civilian education does not preclude the necessity to acquire military knowledge and skills addressed in NCOES courses
  - o Reducing peer interaction for NCOs testing-out of resident NCOES courses
- Logistical or Administrative
  - o Administering tests at various locations throughout the Army
  - o Tracking equivalent credit results in personnel records
  - o Scheduling sufficient cadre and courses to train all necessary NCOs, given the unpredictable number of NCOs testing-out or receiving credit
- Sociological
  - o Gauging how testing-out or equivalent credit will affect esprit-de-corps
  - o Determining the likelihood a testing-out failure would produce a stigma with other NCOs or military leaders
  - o Forecasting possible impacts on promotion board members and assignment managers

The final part of the survey requested participant agreement or disagreement with items in two major areas: factors to be considered for awarding equivalent credit and how NCOs should spend time that might become available if they receive credit for some NCOES content and are not required to attend classes. Participants could write-in additional items for each of the major areas.

5

Participants were selected by the installation points of contact (POCs) at each installation. POCs were asked to select individuals within general groups of personnel who were thought to be most knowledgeable about the current NCOES program. Targeted personnel, whether military or civilian, needed to be able to assess the potential impacts of modifying NCOES attendance requirements and potentially awarding NCOES credit based on testing or experience. The general groups of personnel identified were:

- TRADOC Center and School Leaders (e.g., Command Sergeant Major [CSM])
- NCO Academy (NCOA) Leaders (e.g., Commandant, Course Directors)
- Training unit leaders (e.g., Battalion Commander [CDR] or CSM)
- Members of the School Proponency Office
- Schedulers, program of instruction (POI) managers, and training developers for NCOES courses
- Instructors from the NCOA
- Small-Group Instructors (SGIs) from a Captain Career Course who are former company commanders.

The number of participants within each of the general groups varied between installations based on the availability of targeted personnel. Table 2 shows the distribution of participants by duty position. No NCOs currently attending the Basic Noncommissioned Officer Course (BNCOC) participated because it was thought that all participants needed to have successfully completed BNCOC in order to provide an informed assessment of testing-out implications.

Table 2
Number of Participants by Duty Position

Duty Position	No. of Participants
Center or School Leadership (CDR or CSM, Brigade or higher)	9
NCOA Leadership (Commandant/Deputy or Course Director)	19
Unit Leader (Battalion CDR or CSM)	12
School Proponency Office	9
School Staff (Writers, POI Managers, Training Developers)	41
NCOA Instructor	50
SGI (Captain Career Course - former Company CDRs)	24
Total =	**164**

Note. CDR = Commander; CSM = Command Sergeant Major; NCOA = Noncommissioned Officer Academy; POI = Program of instruction; SGI = Small group instructor.

As shown in Table 3, participants were not evenly distributed across branches (specialties). School leaders included both School and training brigade-level CSMs. NCOA leaders were commandants, deputy commandants, or course directors for either BNCOC or the Advanced Noncommissioned Officer Course (ANCOC). Unit leaders included Lieutenant Colonels (LTCs), battalion-level CSMs, and First Sergeants (1SGs). Proponency Office personnel were primarily senior NCOs. School staff included those personnel whose regular work supported or was impacted by the NCOES programs. Those representatives included

personnel responsible for training development, POI management, course scheduling, etc. Those personnel were mainly NCOs, some retired from the Army and serving as government civilians in the School. No participants were contractors. Instructors from the NCOA spanned all courses from the Warrior Leader Course to ANCOC; they included Sergeants First Class (SFC) and Staff Sergeants (SSG). The SGIs for the Captain Career Courses were Majors and Captains (CPTs). All were former company commanders who had supervised and commanded NCOs, many during combat deployment. Personnel from 15 different branches (specialties) participated. There was no intent to obtain an equal number of participants from each of the Schools, but rather to include a representative sample from the participating Schools. About half of the participants (53%) came from the three major combat arms schools: Armor, Artillery, and Infantry.

Table 3
Number on Participants by Branch (Specialty) and Rank Groups

Branch (Specialty)	No. of Participants	Officer (LTC-CPT)	Senior NCO[1] (CSM-1SG)	SFC	SSG	CIVILIAN
Adjutant General	21	3	13	4	1	0
Armor	39	10	9	6	14	0
Artillery	27	2	7	11	6	1
Chaplain	8	0	2	4	1	1
Chemical	7	2	3	2	0	0
Engineer	11	0	4	6	1	0
Finance	8	1	2	3	2	0
Infantry	21	9	4	3	5	0
Military Police	10	2	7	1	0	0
Quartermaster	5	0	3	2	0	0
Recruiter	6	0	1	5	0	0
Special Forces	1	1	0	0	0	0
Total	**164**	**30**	**55**	**47**	**30**	**2**

Note: Civilians who were retired military were counted in military rank.
LTC = Lieutenant Colonel; CPT = Captain; NCO = Noncommissioned Officer; CSM = Command Sergeant Major; 1SG = First Sergeant; SFC = Sergeant First Class; SSG = Staff Sergeant.

The rank groups used in Table 3 and throughout this report were determined based on analysis of results from participants. Most officers expressed the same views in surveys and interviews, regardless of their rank. The more "senior NCOs", from 1SG through CSM, generally provided very similar view points and responses. In many instances, responses from the lower ranking NCOs, SFC and SSG, differed from the more senior NCOs. Responses from the SFC and SSG rank groups often differed from each other.

---

[1] While the traditional Army breakout of senior NCOs generally includes SFCs and above, for purposes of distinguishing the differences in responses between the various NCO ranks, the rank group of "Senior NCO" excludes SFCs; SFC and SSG results are reported separately.

Participants had served in leadership positions from teams, sections, and squads up through major commands and organizations. They served during both peacetime and combat. Many had previously been instructors for officer and NCO courses. All NCOs who participated were BNCOC graduates and many had attended higher-level NCOES courses. Table 4 highlights participants' time in service and time in duty position. A majority of the participants (77%) had experienced at least one combat deployment for Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) or Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). More than half (53%) of the participants, including those with OIF or OEF deployments, had other combat deployment experience. Nearly all (91%) of the participants had experienced at least one combat deployment. Combat deployments spanned a variety of locations and conditions ranging from full combat during Operations Desert Shield/Desert Storm in Iraq and Operation Just Cause in Panama, to peacekeeping operations in war-torn locations such as Kosovo, Bosnia, the Sinai, and Somalia.

Table 4
Experience of Participants

Time in Service	Average (years)	Max (years)	Min (years)
Military	17.4	34.2	4.5
Civilian	6.4	31.5	1
Time in Duty Position	1.4	8.8	1 month

Note: N=164. Military time in service numbers exclude two civilian participants.

Results

The following results are organized to answer the three key questions previously identified in the Purpose and Scope section. While the overall majority of the participants responded similarly to most survey items, analysis of the input provided in the surveys and interviews indicated that when participants varied in their responses, the differences were generally based on one of two major criteria: the rank group of the participants or their duty position. Differential results related to rank or duty position are highlighted in the following sections.

Throughout the survey participants could choose "undecided" or "no impact", rather than specifying agreement or disagreement with a particular item. For some items, all participants expressed a position, while other items had a large percentage of participants who selected undecided or no impact. Considering the total group for each item, the amount of undecided participants generally varied from about 5% to about 20%. When examined by rank group and duty position, the amount of undecided participants exceeded 50% for some items.

A topic of concern in the project addressed whether Reserve Component (RC) NCOs should be handled any differently from the Active Duty NCOs. Given that RC personnel are being deployed in high numbers, it is not surprising that 85% of the participants (ranging from 73% for SSG to 89% for SFC and Senior NCOs) agreed that all NCOs, active and reserve, should be handled the same concerning testing-out or receiving equivalent credit.

As stated at the beginning of the survey form (Appendix A) and as explained to individuals prior to responding, testing-out refers to some form of formal testing, either written, hands-on or a combination of both, that must be completed to a specified level of performance. Questions throughout the survey and subsequent interview sessions addressed different aspects of testing-out.

The majority of the participants agreed that an NCO should be able to test-out of certain subjects taught in BNCOC (Appendix A, Section I, #1), however there was significant variation in responses from the participants. Table 5 shows the responses displayed by different rank groups and duty positions. Officers and School staff personnel generally favored testing-out more than the junior NCOs, the Proponency Office personnel, and the NCOA instructors. Also, even though the survey question specifically asked about testing-out of BNCOC, participants indicated during interviews that their position on testing-out of selected subjects applied equally to other NCOES courses.

Table 5
Percentage Who Agreed with Testing-out of Selected BNCOC Subjects by Rank Group and Duty Position

Rank Group	% Agree	Duty Position	% Agree
Officers	75%	School Leaders	56%
Senior NCO	59%	NCOA Leaders	61%
SFC	53%	Unit Leaders	58%
SSG	43%	School Proponency Office	44%
		School Staff	68%
		NCOA Instructor	47%
		SGI (former Co CDRs)	68%
Total	**58%**	**Total**	**58%**

Note: N = 164. NCO = Noncommissioned Officer; SFC = Sergeant First Class; SSG = Staff Sergeant; NCOA = NCO Academy; SGI = Small Group Instructor; Co CDRs = Company Commanders.

The only item where participants typically supported testing-out was referred to as "common core" material. Classes that are covered in all NCOES courses for a particular grade level or for which distance learning options for credit are already available or being implemented would fit into this item. Some NCOAs have instituted or are moving toward a "Phase I" for a course which includes on-line blocks of training that must be completed as a prerequisite for an NCO to attend the resident phases of a course. Completing these on-line courses would be considered as testing-out, according to a few participants. A small number of participants (less than 10%) suggested that certain technical skills could be considered for testing-out. The caveat was that each Proponent School would need to determine which technical skills could be eligible for testing-out and how that testing-out would be accomplished. They also suggested that an NCO who changed branches (e.g., reenlistment option, reclassification) should not be eligible to test-out of any technical skills.

Participants who identified specific subject areas that should be mandatory for resident NCOES attendance generally agreed on the content for those areas. The most prevalent area was leadership skills. Reading a leadership manual and taking a test should not be a substitute for gathering with peers to discuss leadership experiences and challenges each has faced in a variety of situations and conditions. The second most common area for resident attendance involved tactical training. While most NCOs have combat deployment experience and have participated in field training, much of that experience is strongly influenced by their unit operating procedures, as well as the tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) used by the local commander. Most participants believed that NCOs needed to learn the most current and approved Army doctrine, including TTPs, from the TRADOC School. Just as with leadership experiences, NCOs would also be able to share their specific tactical experiences with instructors and other NCOs so all could benefit from each other's collective experiences.

Participants who did not agree with testing-out (about 40%) offered their rationale for mandatory attendance for all NCOES classes. The fundamental reason was to ensure that every NCO has the opportunity to gain the necessary skills and knowledge from the School. Acquisition of the skills and knowledge would then be tested or evaluated according to Army doctrine and standards. Their comments generally included that Schools are established and operated to train NCOs. Training at the Schools is validated by high-level review processes. Instructors are trained and prepared to conduct the training as well as to assess NCO performance. This quality of training can not be replicated through unit experiences. A large number of participants (80%) specifically stated that the most valuable aspect of an NCOES course was the professional development that occurred through peer interaction. Allowing some NCOs to test-out would eliminate those more experienced NCOs from participating in all classes and subjects. Not only would they miss the contributions offered by other NCOs, but the resident attendees would not gain the benefit of the knowledge and experiences from the NCO who tested-out. More details are provided in the section on Implications for Testing-out.

Just as the majority agreed with testing-out of selected subjects, they were even more in agreement concerning the need to attend some classes and subjects for each NCOES course. Two specific items from the survey were:
- Item #1 (Appendix A, Section I, #1): An NCO should <u>NOT</u> have the opportunity to test-out of an entire course.
- Item #2 (Appendix A, Section I, #19): Some classes are so crucial that no testing-out should be allowed.

Responses to these items are shown in Table 6.

Participants believed that for professional development, NCOs needed to attend some resident training for each level of NCOES. While NCOs learn and gain experiences from duty assignments and other NCOs, there are subjects that are best covered in face-to-face institutional training. Some specifically stressed during interviews that NCOES attendance was so important that NCOs should be released from their unit to attend a course when they are scheduled, even if this means allowing an NCO to return to School during a combat deployment. Even if an NCO is highly proficient in his duty assignment, there are always other aspects of the MOS or specialty that are probably not covered and learned. Several examples were routinely provided, such as Infantry NCOs operating in light versus mechanized or wheeled units, and Military

Police manning checkpoints versus providing convoy or route security. Attending resident NCOES courses allows NCOs to diversify within their specialty and learn from others' experiences.

Table 6
Percentage Who Agreed NCOs Should Attend Portions of NCOES Courses by Rank Group and Duty Position

Rank Group	% Agree		Duty Position	% Agree	
	Item #1	Item #2		Item #1	Item #2
Officers	93%	86%	School Leaders	89%	78%
Senior NCO	87%	87%	NCOA Leaders	89%	100%
SFC	79%	98%	Unit Leaders	92%	75%
SSG	83%	83%	School Proponency Office	89%	100%
			School Staff	76%	93%
			NCOA Instructor	86%	90%
			SGI (former Co CDRs)	91%	83%
Total	**84%**	**90%**	**Total**	**84%**	**90%**

Note. N = 164. Item #1: An NCO should <u>NOT</u> have the opportunity to test-out of an entire course. Item #2: Some classes are so crucial that no testing-out should be allowed.
NCO = Noncommissioned Officer; SFC = Sergeant First Class; SSG = Staff Sergeant; NCOA = NCO Academy; SGI = Small Group Instructor; Co CDRs = Company Commanders.

Another item on the survey (Appendix A, Section I, #10) specifically stated, "All BNCOC classes should be mandatory for all NCOs." The intent of this item was to ascertain the participants' emphasis on the importance of classes. Anticipated answers should be the opposite of the results in Table 5 (agreement to allow some testing-out) and while that general pattern can be seen in Table 7, there is some variation. Officers and School staff personnel, along with unit leaders, generally were less in agreement with all classes being mandatory than NCOs, the NCOA leaders, the Proponency Office personnel, and the NCOA instructors. During interviews some participants thought some of the current classes in NCOES courses were outdated or irrelevant for today's operating environment (OE), and therefore, should not be mandatory. This point emphasizes that NCOES course content needs updating and still supports the majority position of agreement for testing-out of selected classes. Others made the point that NCOs are developing special skills and expertise to cope with the situations in today's OE, but they are not practicing and understanding fundamental doctrine that they will need throughout the remainder of their career. Some explained that NCOs might have experience in certain aspects of their MOS, such as establishing and operating a checkpoint, but lack the skill and expertise in other MOS requirements. This is exacerbated for NCOs in a low density MOS. For example, some Signal NCOs may work with and support a unit with only selected communications systems, and not the full spectrum of communication systems that a completely trained signal NCO is expected to know. Finally, some participants stated that NCOs are taking on higher levels of responsibility that mandate the proper training and preparation attainable from NCOES courses, but not usually acquired through unit experiences.

Table 7
Percentage Who Agreed All BNCOC Classes Should be Mandatory by Rank Group and Duty Position

Rank Group	% Agree	Duty Position	% Agree
Officers	35%	School Leaders	56%
Senior NCO	61%	NCOA Leaders	72%
SFC	60%	Unit Leaders	42%
SSG	59%	School Proponency Office	67%
		School Staff	47%
		NCOA Instructor	60%
		SGI (former Co CDRs)	44%
Total	**55%**	**Total**	**55%**

Note: N = 164. NCO = Noncommissioned Officer; SFC = Sergeant First Class; SSG = Staff Sergeant; NCOA = NCO Academy; SGI = Small Group Instructor; Co CDRs = Company Commanders.

Determining what classes should allow testing-out and determining how to administer testing-out. The overwhelming majority of participants agreed that NCOES courses should include both leadership (92%) and technical (95%) skills needed for the next higher grade level (Appendix A, Section I, #11 & #12). They also generally agreed that some common core and leadership subjects were consistent across the different specialties and MOSs we examined. They agreed that an agency such as the U.S. Army Sergeant Major Academy would be able to identify these subjects, along with establishing the criteria for testing-out, if deemed appropriate. Participants were also very clear that skills required for different specialties and MOSs varied significantly. Therefore, a specific set of classes eligible for testing-out could not be identified for all NCOES courses. As seen in Table 8, participants believed that each TRADOC School should determine what specific classes should be considered for testing-out (Appendix A, Section I, #20).

Table 8
Percentage Who Agreed with Each School Determining Classes Eligible for Testing-out by Rank Group and Duty Position

Rank Group	% Agree	Duty Position	% Agree
Officers	69%	School Leaders	44%
Senior NCO	59%	NCOA Leaders	67%
SFC	83%	Unit Leaders	58%
SSG	77%	School Proponency Office	67%
		School Staff	83%
		NCOA Instructor	78%
		SGI (former Co CDRs)	61%
Total	**72%**	**Total**	**72%**

Note: N = 164. NCO = Noncommissioned Officer; SFC = Sergeant First Class; SSG = Staff Sergeant; NCOA = NCO Academy; SGI = Small Group Instructor; Co CDRs = Company Commanders.

More junior NCOs, as well as School staff and NCOA instructors, were generally more in agreement on this item than more senior personnel. The explanation of this difference came from survey write-in responses and points made during the interview periods with the more junior personnel. Recent combat deployments have shown these junior personnel that the evolving requirements for NCOs and the quickly changing conditions in today's OE demand NCOES courses that can change to meet real-world needs in technical subjects and include leadership skills necessary for the challenges NCOs will face. Because personnel in the different MOSs are employed quite differently in the OE, each School must assess the requirements and adjust NCOES courses to meet the needs of their MOS within the Army. Participants provided some examples to clarify this point. In the current OE, Artillery and Armor units infrequently use their MOS technical skills of conducting fire missions and mounted gunnery. Therefore, NCOES courses need to emphasize these technical skills more. Likewise, NCOs are leading dismounted operations in proximity to local civilians and are required to interface with non-military organizations on a regular basis. The leadership skills required for this environment are quite different from those required of a firing section or tank unit leader giving commands to Soldiers. Thus, these new skills need to be included in the NCOES courses. The same situation applies to NCOs in the support role. Much of the logistical support requirement in the OE is handled by contractors so Quartermaster NCOs are not executing their full scope of responsibilities. Likewise, Finance and Adjutant General branch NCOs might know how to perform selected aspects of their jobs using a local database format, but rarely experience the full scope of their responsibilities during a duty assignment (e.g., a Finance NCO might be responsible for handling pay issues such as reenlistment or bonus payments, but not be involved in dealing with travel payments).

Some items on the survey solicited input on how testing-out should be implemented (Appendix A, Section I, #14-17). Table 9 shows responses to various items. While about half of the participants agreed with conducting testing-out at home station, unit leaders and Proponency Office personnel did not agree. While testing-out at home station would decrease the amount of time the NCO would spend away from his home and unit, participants stated the major reasons for not allowing testing-out at home station were to avoid the potential for test compromise and to minimize "cheating" on the test. The more senior NCOs expressed concerns that there would be "command influence" and the potential for "preferential treatment" from unit leaders who wanted to reward their NCOs. They believed units might attempt to use any means available to assist their NCOs in obtaining the test-out credit necessary to allow them to remain at home station for a longer period of time. More details are provided in Results sections later.

Officers and School Proponency Office personnel were the least in agreement about conducting written tests. Their concern was that some very capable and experienced NCOs were not skilled at taking written tests and could be judged unfairly. All rank groups and duty positions were more in favor of hands-on testing than a written test. It was also quite evident that all groups of participants (86% overall) were in agreement that any testing-out should include both written and hands-on components.

While testing consisting of both written and hands-on components was deemed the preferred testing-out procedure by the vast majority (86%) of participants, some concerns were

apparent. For example, participants identified six items for consideration when testing is to be conducted at a Soldier's home station.

- Hands-on testing may require equipment not available at home stations.
- Hands-on testing can require skilled evaluators, not always available at home stations.
- Hands-on testing allows for subjective assessment, even with standardized checklists.
- Written tests would likely need to be updated frequently to retain currency.
- Home station leadership could be more lenient and might not enforce strict standards.
- Both NCO and unit priorities are influenced by the mission at hand or future missions, so preparation for testing-out will be limited.

Means to prevent test compromise and to minimize cheating are provided in the Results sections later.

Table 9

Percentage Who Agreed with Different Options for Testing-out by Rank Group and Duty Position

	% Agree			
Rank Group	Home Station	Written	Hands-on	Written & Hands-on
Officers	50%	24%	45%	93%
Senior NCO	40%	51%	64%	82%
SFC	54%	57%	66%	87%
SSG	47%	62%	69%	87%
Duty Position				
School Leaders	56%	67%	67%	67%
NCOA Leaders	47%	65%	75%	89%
Unit Leaders	17%	42%	42%	92%
School Proponency Office	22%	33%	67%	78%
School Staff	58%	51%	63%	85%
NCOA Instructor	50%	59%	71%	86%
SGI (former Co CDRs)	46%	22%	39%	92%
Total	**47%**	**49%**	**62%**	**86%**

Note: N = 164. NCO = Noncommissioned Officer; SFC = Sergeant First Class; SSG = Staff Sergeant; NCOA = NCO Academy; SGI = Small Group Instructor; Co CDRs = Company Commanders.

Testing to Verify NCO Proficiency. One additional point in the testing-out arena addressed whether NCOs are prepared to attend an NCOES course. NCOA leaders and instructors stated that some NCOs arrive for a course and are not properly prepared. Preparation fit into two categories:

- Being in compliance with the Army height/weight standards and being able to pass the Army Physical Fitness Test (APFT)
- Being proficient in lower level (e.g., Skill Level 1 and 2) tasks, both common core and MOS-specific tasks.

In regards to the Army standards for height/weight and the APFT, participants expressed concern about the role of the NCOA in verifying compliance. Participants who expressed an opinion during interviews generally fit into opposite camps. One group was adamant that the NCOA should be the independent and unbiased agency to ensure that every NCO complied with the height/weight and APFT standards. Some participants suggested unit leaders might be more lenient on their NCOs than the NCOA in applying the Army standards. Other participants suggested compliance with height/weight and APFT standards should remain the responsibility of the operational unit.

Regarding the verification of lower level skill proficiency prior to NCOES attendance, participants varied significantly, as shown in Table 10. School leaders and Proponency Office personnel did not agree with this skill level testing. Their expressed opinion was that the NCOA should be prepared to bring each NCO up to the appropriate skill level during the NCOES course. In contrast, participants responsible for developing and conducting training (NCOA leaders and instructors, unit leaders, School staff, and SGI) strongly supported prior testing (72% to 88%). Instructors stated that unless the NCOA or some other independent agency tests and verifies an NCO's skill and knowledge preparedness to attend a course, the NCOA would need to gear its training program to allow for training NCOs starting at some lower skill level. This requirement adds length to the course, delays progressing to higher skill level training, and can lead to the more skilled NCOs adopting the attitude that they should not be required to attend the course.

Table 10

Percentage Who Agreed with Skill Level 1 and 2 Testing Prior to NCOES Attendance by Rank Group and Duty Position

Rank Group	% Agree	Duty Position	% Agree
Officers	83%	School Leaders	11%
Senior NCO	53%	NCOA Leaders	74%
SFC	80%	Unit Leaders	83%
SSG	73%	School Proponency Office	33%
		School Staff	72%
		NCOA Instructor	74%
		SGI (former Co CDRs)	88%
Total	**70%**	**Total**	**70%**

Note: N = 164. NCO = Noncommissioned Officer; SFC = Sergeant First Class; SSG = Staff Sergeant; NCOA = NCO Academy; SGI = Small Group Instructor; Co CDRs = Company Commanders.

Receiving "equivalent credit" based on experience. In addition to some formal testing-out process, one specific option considered for obtaining equivalent NCOES credit was based on the NCO's prior experience, mainly gained from duty assignments and job positions. The intent behind this item was to gain input concerning whether on-the-job experience should be considered sufficient to grant an NCO credit for some specified classes, instead of testing-out or course attendance. Participants offered many comments concerning the feasibility of this option.

Because many NCOs have gained vast experience during combat deployments, the survey included two general items addressing credit for experience:
- Item #1 (Appendix A, Section I, #4): An NCO should receive credit for an entire course based on experience.
- Item #2 (Appendix A, Section I, #3): An NCO should receive credit for selected NCOES classes based on experience.

Table 11 displays the responses for these two items.

Table 11

Percentage Who Agreed NCOs Should Receive NCOES Credit Based on Experience by Rank Group and Duty Position

Rank Group	% Agree		Duty Position	% Agree	
	Item #1	Item #2		Item #1	Item #2
Officers	10%	57%	School Leaders	11%	33%
Senior NCO	13%	37%	NCOA Leaders	21%	42%
SFC	11%	28%	Unit Leaders	8%	33%
SSG	13%	43%	School Proponency Office	0%	25%
			School Staff	5%	32%
			NCOA Instructor	18%	38%
			SGI (former Co CDRs)	9%	63%
Total	**12%**	**39%**	**Total**	**12%**	**39%**

Note: N = 164. Item #1: An NCO should receive credit for an entire course based on experience. Item #2: An NCO should receive credit for selected NCOES classes based on experience. NCO = Noncommissioned Officer; SFC = Sergeant First Class; SSG = Staff Sergeant; NCOA = NCO Academy; SGI = Small Group Instructor; Co CDRs = Company Commanders.

While responses varied somewhat among duty positions, the overwhelming majority (88%) agreed an NCO should not receive credit for an entire NCOES course based solely on experience. In this same regard, about 40% of the participants supported awarding credit for experience for selected classes. Officers were the only group where the majority agreed with credit for experience.

Interviews with participants and write-in responses on the survey identified reasons for not awarding credit for experience. Some of the more prevalent points included:
- Serving in a duty position does not equate to gaining skills and knowledge.
- Merely serving in a duty position does not mean the person did the job to standard.
- Skills required in a duty position can vary drastically depending on the OE and conditions where the duty assignment occurred.
- Duty positions generally do not require an NCO to use and demonstrate all skills specified at that skill level; an NCO might be proficient and demonstrate skills for selected tasks and not others.
- Credit would need to be awarded and determined by unit leaders, which leads to subjective bias rather than an objective measure of skill. For example, deployed NCOs might be rated more on their ability to perform security patrols rather than the ability to successfully perform MOS-specific and other core duties.

If equivalent NCOES credit was to be awarded based on experience and not testing, the survey asked respondents what level of the chain-of-command (company, battalion, or brigade) should be allowed to award the NCOES credit. Another question asked if NCOES credit was to be awarded by the chain-of-command, should it be awarded as part of the NCO Evaluation Report (NCOER). Responses from participants on these survey items (Appendix A, Section I, #5-8) are provided in Table 12.

Table 12

Percentage Who Agreed with Different Options for Awarding NCOES Credit for Experience by Rank Group and Duty Position

	% Agree			
Rank Group	Company Level	Battalion Level	Brigade Level	NCOER
Officers	7%	17%	23%	17%
Senior NCO	2%	6%	11%	0%
SFC	4%	9%	20%	6%
SSG	7%	23%	27%	20%
Duty Position				
School Leaders	0%	11%	33%	0%
NCOA Leaders	0%	5%	0%	0%
Unit Leaders	8%	8%	8%	0%
School Proponency Office	0%	0%	22%	0%
School Staff	0%	0%	24%	2%
NCOA Instructor	8%	14%	16%	16%
SGI (former Co CDRs)	8%	21%	25%	20%
Total	**4%**	**12%**	**18%**	**9%**

Note: N = 164. NCOER = Noncommissioned Officer (NCO) Evaluation Report; SFC = Sergeant First Class; SSG = Staff Sergeant; NCOA = NCO Academy; SGI = Small Group Instructor; Co CDRs = Company Commanders.

As shown in Table 12, the overwhelming majority (91%) believed awarding NCOES credit for experience should not be included in the NCOER. Participants who supported credit for experience offered that some formal procedure with objective criteria would need to be established and controlled at a high level (e.g., Department of the Army) in order to minimize abuse of this option. Otherwise, unit leaders might be inclined to award NCOES credit to NCOs as a "reward for a job well done" or to allow the NCO to spend more time at the unit rather than attending all classes at an institutional NCOES course. The concern was that some NCOs would receive NCOES credit without possessing the skills and knowledge taught in the NCOES course.

While agreement was very low in all cases, participants were more in favor of brigade level awarding NCOES credit (18%) than either of the lower echelons. Only 12% agreed with the battalion level awarding NCOES credit and 4% agreed with company level. More than 80% agreed that even up to the brigade level, the chain-of-command should not be allowed to award NCOES credit. One participant stated a position that was echoed by many others, "Army regulations define NCOES attendance requirements. If we allow agencies other than

instructional schools to regulate and enforce standards concerning who receives credit, we are headed down a hill with no return."

Participants provided responses to other items that could be considered for awarding equivalent NCOES credit (Appendix A, Section V). Other items included: combat tours; leadership positions in combat, a troop unit, or a staff assignment; civilian education; awards and decorations; non-NCOES school attendance; duty as a Drill Sergeant/Instructor; and duty with a mobile training team (MTT). While the majority of some groups agreed with various items being considered for credit, only two items, serving in a leadership position in either combat or a troop unit, received a majority of agreement (60% and 56% respectively). Other items which received majority agreement within any rank group or duty position are shown in Table 13.

Table 13
Items to be Considered for Experience Credit Receiving Majority Support by Rank Group and Duty Position

Items	Rank Group	Duty Position
Combat tours	SSG	School Staff
Leadership position in combat	All	All <u>except</u> unit leaders & Proponency Office
Leadership position in troop unit	All	All <u>except</u> NCOA leadership, unit leaders & Proponency Office
Leadership position in a staff	None	School Staff
Civilian education	None	SGI (former Co CDRs)
Military school (non-NCOES)	Officer & SFC	NCOA Leadership & School Staff
Duty as a Drill Sergeant or Instructor	Officer & SSG	NCOA Leadership, School Staff & SGI (former Co CDRs)
Duty with MTT	Officer & SSG	SGI (former Co CDRs)

Note: N = 164. Agreement percentages ranged from 50 to 61%. SSG = Staff Sergeant; NCOA = Noncommissioned Officer (NCO) Academy; SGI = Small Group Instructor; Co CDRs = Company Commanders; NCOES = NCO Education System; SFC = Sergeant First Class; MTT = Mobile Training Team.

Implications of Testing-out

While many aspects of NCOES courses would be impacted if the Army implements some form of testing-out, the most prevalent response from participants was the negative impact of decreasing peer interaction. All rank groups and duty positions (80% overall) agreed that the professional development NCOs gain from interacting with peers during resident NCOES courses would suffer if the more talented and experienced NCOs tested-out of some classes. One participant, referring to recent and the current Army slogan stated, "We are no longer an 'Army of 1', we are 'Army Strong' - - and we are strong because we work together as teams to learn and accomplish missions." A common response was that NCOs frequently learn more from peer

interaction than from classroom presentations or lectures. Even NCOES instructors expressed the value of having skilled and experienced NCOs in residence, indicating they contribute to classroom instruction by sharing their knowledge and current information about the OE.

Educational impacts of testing-out. Of all areas considered, participants believed that the education of NCOs is the area that would have the most negative impact on the Army (Appendix A, Section III). Overall, at least 70% agreed that allowing testing-out would negatively impact all of the items listed in Table 14.

Table 14
*Ten Educational Items Most **Negatively** Impacted by Testing-out*

Educational Items Negatively Impacted	% Overall Agreed
Enhancing professional development through peer interaction	80%
Collaborating among students (e.g., study groups)	80%
Benefiting from learning in a social setting	80%
Enhancing the learning process through peer coaching	79%
Sharing of experience and ideas among resident students	79%
Sharing of experience and ideas between instructors and students	78%
Sharing of lessons learned among resident students	77%
Verifying that NCO actually possesses required skill to skip class or course	71%
Obtaining student ideas for improving courses or classes	70%
Updating NCOs on latest doctrine and TTPS	70%

Note. N = 164. NCO = Noncommissioned Officer; TTPs = tactics, techniques, and procedures.

Officers expressed a higher than average level of agreement with these negative impacts, with all of the items in Table 14 receiving 80% to 100%. While the majority of the SFC rank group agreed that all of these items would be negatively impacted, the group was consistently below the average with the level of agreement between 60% and 72%.   When examined by duty positions, the more senior groups and the SGIs for officers provided 74% or higher agreement on every item. The Proponency Office personnel (67% to 89%), School staff (54% to 71%) and NCOA instructors (64% to 80%) expressed less than 70% agreement on a few items, principally the last three items in Table 14.

In addition to the items in Table 14, the majority of participants agreed that other educational items would be negatively impacted by testing-out. These included:
- Updating NCOs on new equipment, organization changes, and new methods or procedures for accomplishing tasks
- Ensuring that all NCOs attend crucial classes
- Ensuring that civilian education does not preclude the need to acquire military skill.

Some written responses regarding these items stated that while an NCO might be knowledgeable of current equipment and organizational structures, these evolve and NCOES attendance is a key means to disseminate such changes to the Army. Unique differences between military and civilian organizations were noted by some participants (e.g., military police have responsibilities under different conditions from civilian police, finance personnel use standard accounting

practices but rules for the military vary from civilian businesses). The ability to network and discuss lessons learned and individual experiences face-to-face is vital in the development of NCOs; merely learning book knowledge or obtaining civilian education does not provide necessary NCO skills.

During interviews participants repeatedly emphasized perceived negative impacts of testing-out on NCO education. Regardless of attempts to interject or suggest some potential positive impacts, participants routinely and strongly expressed the value of interpersonal relationships, learning and working among peers, and how such interaction would be hindered if more experienced NCOs tested-out of some classes. One BNCOC instructor stated, "Students teach each other as much as we teach them. We teach doctrine and many of the TTPs come from the students. This interaction is critical." As stated by another School instructor, "I believe that most of what you learn at NCOES Schools is learned from interaction with other students and sharing experiences." The major concern is that NCOs with the most experience and knowledge would test-out of some NCOES classes and then would not be present to share those experiences and knowledge with others.

Logistical and administrative impacts of testing-out. As with the educational area, the majority of participants identified several logistical or administrative items that would be negatively impacted by testing-out. While the items span a variety of issues, they can be grouped into the following categories:
- Additional requirements for NCOA staff and instructors
  - Creating tests (hands-on and written) and objective evaluations
  - Updating tests to maintain currency with OE
  - Administering tests at different locations, controlling the tests, and maintaining test security
  - Scheduling courses, classes, and exercises to maximize NCO participation and benefit
  - Determining NCOA staffing requirements for responsibilities other than resident students (e.g., developing materials for and possibly conducting testing-out)
- Complications of tracking individual NCOES class credits
  - Tracking each NCO for each class for each NCOES course
  - Determining class standing when NCOs could test-out of different classes
- Establishing and enforcing equitable rules for testing-out
  - Who determines what classes are eligible for testing-out, what the rules are for testing-out, and who has approval authority across the Schools
  - Deciding common core testing-out rules and their impact on MOS-specific classes

While many logistical and administrative items could be negatively impacted, there was less overall agreement by the participants in these items than were found in the educational area. All of the educational items shown in Table 14 received at least 70% negative agreement while only one administrative item exceeded the 70% negative agreement level. Table 15 provides a list of the logistical and administrative items (Appendix A, Section II) where at least 50% of the participants agreed that testing-out would cause a negative impact.

It is worth noting that generally 15% to 25% of the participants were "undecided" on many of these items, which contributed to the overall lower percentage of agreement. During interviews participants clarified their "undecided" responses by saying they could see both negative and positive implications of testing-out; even though there was more negative than positive, they wanted to indicate a dual impact. One example was utilizing NCO time when not attending class. About 20% of participates indicated "undecided" and the remainder were equally divided between positive and negative impact. On the positive side, if NCOs test-out of some classes and spend less time at a resident School, then units will be able to obtain better utilization from the NCOs. On the contrary, if an NCO tests-out of a class that occurs during a resident phase of a course, then the NCOA must find ways to gain utilization from the NCO which increases the burden on the NCOA cadre.

Table 15
Logistical and Administrative Items Most __Negatively__ Impacted by Testing-out

Logistical and Administrative Items Negatively Impacted	% Overall Agreed
Determining class standing when NCO attends only part of classes	75%
Justifying or defending testing-out decisions	68%
Determining NCO Academy staffing requirements	62%
Administering equivalent credit (e.g., rules, who approves, tracking)	60%
Determining what classes can be skipped based on equivalent credit	59%
Creating tests and grading scales	59%
Maintaining accurate personnel records	58%
Tracking individual NCO classes that are tested-out	58%
Scheduling courses, classes, and exercises	57%
Administering tests (e.g., location, control, security, time, resources)	56%
Determining what classes can be tested-out	55%
Awarding credit for branch or specialty-specific classes	54%
Tracking individual NCO class attendance	52%

Note. N = 164. NCO = Noncommissioned Officer.

There were no logistical or administrative items where the majority of the participants agreed there would be a positive impact. However, 37% to 40% of the participants identified three items where testing-out might cause a positive impact. As mentioned previously, one item was utilizing NCO time when not in a resident class, which could allow the NCO to spend more time at home station performing duties with the operational unit. Another item was awarding credit for common core or common skills classes. Participants commented during interviews that these common classes could be completed at home station via web-based training modules or through arrangement of video teleconferences. Common core classes can be identified, developed, and maintained by the U.S. Army Sergeant Major Academy. This would allow certification of satisfactory completion to be tracked by a single source rather than having each TRADOC School accomplish the testing and tracking. A final logistical item mentioned was in and out processing. A negative viewpoint emphasized that NCOs could be arriving at different times to begin a resident course, which would require multiple in and out processing sessions. In contrast, a positive impact might be that fewer NCOs would be arriving at the start of each

course, so the demand on support agencies to handle the in and out processing requirements would be spread more evenly over time.

Examining responses by rank group and duty position indicated some distinct differences worth noting. The SFC rank group had a lower level of agreement on every logistical and administrative item than any of the other rank groups. Only the first two items in Table 15 received at least 50% agreement on the negative impact from the SFC rank group. In addition, while there were only two items that received a majority agreement as a positive impact (conducting in and out processing and tracking individual NCO class attendance, both 51% agreement), for half of the items considered, a higher percentage of SFCs indicated that the impact would be positive rather than negative. With the exception of two items for the officer rank group (utilizing NCO time when not in class and conducting in and out processing), all other items for the three rank groups other than SFC, provided a higher level of agreement for a negative impact (ranging from 46% to 87%) than a positive impact (ranging from 3% to 37%).

Various duty positions provided some diversity of opinion as to whether the aforementioned impacts might be more negative or positive. Table 16 provides an indication of how the responses varied. The legend for duty positions is:

1 - School Leaders	4 - School Proponency Office	6 - NCOA Instructor
2 - NCOA Leaders	5 - School Staff	7 - SGI (Co CDRs)
3 - Unit Leaders		

Table 16
Positive (+) or Negative (-) Impact for 16 Logistical or Administrative Items by 7 Duty Positions

Logistical or Administrative Items that Could be Impacted	Duty Positions						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Determining class standing when NCO attends only part of classes	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Justifying or defending testing-out decisions	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Determining NCO Academy staffing requirements	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Administering equivalent credit (e.g. rules, who approves, tracking)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Determining what classes can be skipped based on equivalent credit	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Creating tests and grading scales	-	0	-	-	-	-	-
Maintaining accurate personnel records	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Tracking individual NCO classes that are tested-out	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Scheduling courses, classes, and exercises	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Administering tests (e.g., location, control, security, time, resources)	-	-	-	-	-	+	-
Determining what classes can be tested-out	-	+	-	-	-	-	-
Awarding credit for branch or specialty-specific classes	-	-	-	-	0	-	-
Tracking individual NCO class attendance	-	-	-	-	0	-	-
Awarding credit for common core or common skills classes	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Utilizing NCO time when not in class	-	+	-	-	+	-	+
Conducting in and out processing	-	+	+	-	+	0	-

Note. "+" = more agreement as a positive than negative impact. "-" = more agreement as a negative than positive impact. "0" = equal agreement between positive and negative impact. NCO = Noncommissioned Officer.

The items listed in Table 16 (Appendix A, Section II) are provided in the same sequence as Table 15 (most negative impact at top of list). Additional items identified by the participants are also provided at the end of the list.

Two items attracted the most positive agreement among three of the seven duty positions. The two items were utilizing NCO time when not in class and in and out processing. Participants provided reasons for each of the items where they indicated some degree of positive impact.

- Tracking individual NCO class attendance: Classes eligible for testing-out could be centrally tracked by a single agency and automated system, allowing NCOs to be scheduled only for resident course attendance for selected classes.
- Administering tests: If common core classes are eligible for testing-out, a single agency could be responsible for developing and updating tests, controlling test administration, ensuring proper security procedures are established and followed, and tracking NCO test results, which could reduce some testing requirements for the Schools.
- Creating tests and grading scales: Same comments as administering tests. This group of participants assumed that classes eligible for testing-out would involve common core material and that a single agency other than the NCOAs would develop and administer the tests.
- Determining what classes can be tested-out: Perceived positive impact was linked to a single agency identifying common core classes and administering the testing-out process. Positive impact was also predicated on the belief that each Proponent School would be allowed the flexibility to determine what, if any, MOS-specific classes would be considered for testing-out.
- Awarding credit for branch or MOS-specific classes: The only positive impact agreement for this item was based on allowing Proponent Schools to determine which MOS-specific classes would be considered for testing-out and establishing the objective criteria for awarding credit.

The overall majority of participants generally agreed that implementing testing-out would cause a negative impact, with emphasis on the items listed in Table 15. During interviews participants summarized this pessimistic view with some overarching observations.
The potential exists to reduce the number of contact hours that NCOs spend in a resident NCOES course which, according to the current TRADOC resource model, would lead to a reduction in resources for the NCOAs. However, depending on how testing-out is implemented, participants anticipated an increased demand on NCOA assets. For example, in addition to conducting their regular resident courses, NCOA staff could also be required to develop and administer testing for NCOs at home stations. Because more capable NCOs might miss selected resident classes, instructors would not be able to rely on contributions and assistance from these NCOs to share lessons learned and experiences. Instructors would need to conduct more research in order to include this wider array of information in their classes. Additionally, if testing-out is implemented for MOS-specific subjects, each NCOA would need to establish and maintain a system to track individual NCO completion of each class to ensure every NCO successfully accomplished all course requirements. Finally, if the NCOA attempts to develop and conduct tailored NCOES courses for each NCO who might test-out of different classes, the burden on NCOA staff would increase substantially.

Participants generally agreed that if testing-out is to be implemented, it should be administered at the NCOs' home station to allow the NCOs to spend more time in their unit, if not attending a resident class. While testing common core subjects via an Internet-based system seems a rather routine matter in today's automated world, testing for MOS-specific subjects leads to other major concerns for some of the TRADOC Schools. The first item is developing an objective test that adequately and accurately assesses NCO proficiency. Participants agreed that the test should include both hands-on and written components.   However, many installations do not have all of the equipment necessary to conduct the hands-on testing (e.g., a unit with armored scouts would have a particular vehicle, but would most likely not have the variety of vehicles that scouts could be required to use – Stryker, Bradley, Highly mobile multipurpose wheeled vehicle). Participants emphasized that having the full spectrum of equipment items available at home stations was even a bigger issue for low density MOSs, such as the myriad hardware, software and data processing systems that could be required to conduct testing-out for Signal MOSs. In addition to lacking the variety of equipment (which includes both hardware and software), skilled evaluators to conduct the objective assessment would likely need to come from the NCOA, again, increasing demand on the Proponent Schools. Finally, participants expressed concern about test compromise and the potential that standards might not be fully enforced if testing was decentralized to individual units or installations.

Sociological impacts of testing-out. Overall, participants agreed there would be more negative impact than positive impact for every item considered. Table 17 lists several items (Appendix A, Section IV) where a majority of participants agreed there would be more negative impact.

Table 17
Sociological Items Most __Negatively__ Impacted by Testing-out

Sociological Items Negatively Impacted	% Overall Agreed
Potential stigma of an NCO who is unable to test-out of a class or course	77%
Networking among NCOs	72%
Rating chain perceptions of NCO technical and tactical competence	72%
NCO professional development ribbon (modify to indicate testing-out?)	67%
Promotion board perceptions of NCO technical and tactical competence	62%
Esprit-de-corps among NCOs	61%
Selection of NCOs for joint or special assignments	51%

Note. N = 164. NCO = Noncommissioned Officer.

For some items up to one third of the participants were "undecided", which generally meant they recognized both positive and negative impacts. Based on comments made during interviews and from write-ins on the surveys, they tended to view potential impacts as more negative than positive. For example, morale and attitude could improve for NCOs who tested-out of selected classes and received recognition for that achievement. However, participants generally expressed that if MOS-specific tests were comprehensive, including both hands-on and written components that were administered to standard, very few NCOs would be able to test-out. This could lead to a decrease in morale or esprit-de-corps as other NCOs might resent those who were able to test-out. Likewise, participants generally believed that unit leaders would

encourage NCOs to test-out so they could spend more time at the unit and that leaders would form perceptions of NCOs based largely on their testing-out performance. Again, this could be positive for NCOs who test-out, while those NCOs unable to test-out, and even those who opt not to test-out in favor of resident NCOES attendance, might be negatively impacted.

Reviewing results by rank groups showed that senior NCOs were more in agreement concerning perceived negative impacts than the overall average. There was only one item where any rank group indicated more of a positive than a negative impact. While not a majority for either group, both officers and SSGs responded that implementing testing-out would likely be a positive impact in influencing NCOs to stay in the Army. For this same item, about one third of all participants thought testing-out would have a negative impact, one third said there would be a positive impact, and one third were undecided.

Results by duty position clearly showed differences in responses. None of the Proponency Office personnel indicated any positive impact in the sociological area, except one person who indicated testing-out might increase the likelihood of an NCO staying in the Army. This is quite noteworthy, based on comments provided during interviews. Proponency Office personnel stated that it was their responsibility to prepare written guidance for NCO promotion boards. This guidance stipulated what to consider in the selection process and how to weigh various factors that would be encountered when reviewing NCO records. Even though the Proponency Office could write guidance that addressed fairness in considering testing-out, they believed promotion boards would not necessarily interpret testing-out in a full and fair means. As they stated, with limited time to review records, if an NCO does not test-out of eligible classes it would likely be viewed as a negative point. An NCO who could have tested-out but opted to attend all classes in residence would be viewed the same as a person who could not test-out for some reason. Their main point was that leaders and promotion boards may form views and opinions based on their career experiences and expectations, without having equitable consideration for testing-out issues.

While not quite as strong in their generally negative agreement, only two participants in the School leadership duty position expressed any potential for positive impact. When viewed by duty position, on average, about 20% to 30% of the participants in a duty position were undecided for all items, with nearly 50% undecided for a few items.

Best Practices for Administering Testing-out

During our interviews with participants, they highlighted several concerns that need to be addressed should the Army decide to implement some form of testing-out. As these points emerged in interviews with groups of various sizes, a percentage of agreement could not be calculated. However, the items presented in this section should be considered collective suggestions from the majority of participants.

Participants expressed deep concern about implementing testing-out at home stations, regardless of how it might be executed. The heart of the concern centered on how unit leaders would react to this option. First, participants believed commanders would likely emphasize that NCOs test-out of the maximum possible course content. One benefit would be allowing the

25

NCO to spend more time at home station and less time in a resident NCOES course. A second benefit would be the perceived positive reflection on a unit's competency if more NCOs are able to test-out of course content. In order to increase the likelihood that more NCOs could test-out of more classes, participants believed that units might establish their own NCOES preparation program and mandate that NCOs take part in these training sessions. This would be increasing the workload requirement for these NCOs at home station while they are still required to perform day-to-day tasks, a potential detriment to allowing NCOs to spend time with families. More senior participants, mainly NCOs, also expressed concern that placing increased emphasis on NCOs to test-out could be detrimental to NCO morale. They stated that when more pressure is applied for a program like this, the tendency is to do "whatever it takes" to get NCOs tested-out. Participants again expressed their concern that this pressure could lead to test compromise and various forms of "cheating". While the Army could employ appropriate safeguards to minimize test compromise and cheating, the other important aspect is attempting to influence the mindset and behaviors of unit leaders to minimize this pressure for testing-out. While assisting NCOs to improve their skills and to prepare for tests is good, undo emphasis could create undesired actions by NCOs.

As shown in Table 9, the overwhelming majority (86%) agreed that implementation of testing-out should include both hands-on and written components. As previously stated, any written test could be administered in a similar manner to those in distance learning courses throughout the Army. Participants emphasized two main items in this regard: the importance of maintaining test security to prevent compromise, and verifying the identity of the NCO completing the test. Army installations typically have a testing center or test agency with trained personnel who administer and proctor testing for online tests. Participants generally agreed that any written or online testing-out for NCOES courses could be handled through these established procedures. Actual tests would be developed by the Proponent School, or in the case of common core material, by a single agency. The test materials would be provided to the testing centers at the installations for safeguard and administration. Test results would be forwarded to the agency responsible for tracking testing-out credits, as well as to the individual completing the test.

The item of greatest concern to participants was administering hands-on testing, as there is no standard established means of administration already in place. Participants had experienced a variety of hands-on testing situations: from a one-on-one event where an evaluator observes each action and records the "Go / No Go" results on a checklist, to a large group of personnel each completing an individual task simultaneously. While NCOES hands-on testing could vary its procedures depending on the tasks to be tested, participants were quite adamant about the following four factors.

- Whenever possible hands-on testing was preferred to written testing. Even though hands-on testing is usually more complicated to develop, administer, and evaluate, they believed that it was more important for an NCO to demonstrate he can perform the task, rather than just knowing the answer to a question.
- Test performance should be evaluated on an objective scale, to the maximum extent possible. While lengthy checklists similar to those contained in Mission Training Plan manuals can be very helpful, they are more of a prescriptive guidance aid than a tool to measure performance. These checklists often omit details for actually evaluating performance outcomes. Also, they frequently outline a set of different conditions for the

task and do not identify specific conditions for testing. Specific details and guidance should be provided so all evaluations are conducted identically.

- Hands-on testing should be administered by an independent agency not under the influence of the units providing NCOs to be tested. This increases the likelihood the testing will be conducted with the least amount of bias.
- Personnel selected to evaluate hands-on performance must be certified to ensure they understand proper execution of the tasks, as they assess task performance according to established School standards. NCOs must demonstrate they meet or exceed those standards to receive credit for a class.

Participants routinely provided a common recommendation that satisfies these four requirements; that is, the NCOAs should send "mobile testing teams" to unit installations to conduct hands-on testing.

As mentioned previously, a necessary component for hands-on testing is to have all of the required equipment, both hardware and software, available. Participants suggested some alternative options for consideration. The most preferred procedure would be for each installation to provide the necessary equipment to support hands-on testing. They recognized some of the major drawbacks of this option:

- Some installations will not have all of the necessary equipment. In those instances, the equipment could be brought from some other location, if possible and feasible.
- Operational units are reluctant to release their equipment for "administrative" purposes.
- Obtaining equipment from installations restricts when the testing-out could be conducted, depending on the availability of the equipment and unit schedules.

Participants suggested that mobile testing teams could bring the necessary equipment items to administer hands-on testing at the various locations. This was identified as a remote possibility, perhaps feasible for some Schools and classes. However, they also recognized that in many instances the NCOA does not retain ownership of the equipment, but rather borrows it from a unit or equipment pool when it is needed for training and testing. The NCOA testers could borrow the needed items for remote-site testing, if possible.

Another alternative, although potentially costly and not very effective, is to have a pool of equipment maintained at various test locations that would be available for use by testing personnel from different locations or by the installation testing agency. Given the wide array of potential equipment items, the limited quantity of some equipment, and the responsibility to store, account for, and maintain this potentially vast array of equipment, participants opined it was probably not an acceptable option.

Discussion

It is clear from participants that NCO attendance at NCOES courses is extremely important to the continuing professional development of the NCO Corps. This is not a new belief, but rather echoes the message that Army leaders recognized in the late 1960s (Elder, 1999). The same concern expressed more than 40 years ago reverberated in interviews with participants. Some had experienced the post-Viet Nam War era of the Army of the 1970s and

emphasized that the Army should not regress by implementing procedures that allowed NCOs to skip resident NCOES courses.

The overwhelming majority of participants clearly stated the Army should not implement any actions that award NCOES credit merely based on experience. While NCOs are gaining vast experience in challenging duty assignments in the OE, serving in a duty position does not provide the full complement of knowledge and skills required for future assignments. Some portions of NCOES are so important that resident attendance is essential. The overwhelming majority of participants also agreed the chain-of-command should not be allowed to award NCOES credit. Consistent with the findings of previous ARI research (Knapp, Heffner, and Campbell, 2003), they believed commanders would be prone to award the maximum credit to their NCOs. Without some form of testing or verification, NCOs could receive NCOES credit without possessing the necessary knowledge and skills. Participants were adamant that the NCOER should not be used to award NCOES credit.

Even though the majority supported resident NCOES attendance, they emphasized two significant points. First, some NCOES content is outdated based on world events and operational requirements in today's Army. Proponent Schools should revise NCOES course content to make all material relevant and challenging; Schools should keep courses current in order to be of maximum benefit to NCO professional development. One way to identify needed updates is through input or feedback from NCOES attendees as they share their most recent experiences from various assignments. Second, even when all course content is updated, NCOs could gain required knowledge for some classes through their assignment experiences. Therefore, allowing NCOs an opportunity to test-out of selected classes is a viable option. Participants certainly believed NCOs should be allowed to test-out of common core classes. In addition, Proponents should review their NCOES courses to identify other content that could be eligible for testing-out.

While some form of testing-out should be allowed, participants agreed that a central agency would need to establish policies and procedures for administering testing-out. Guidance should be detailed enough to ensure a high level of consistency across TRADOC Schools and to assure that Army standards for skills and knowledge are not compromised. However, participants recognized that each Proponent School must be allowed to determine the specific classes eligible for testing-out; apart from the common core material, no single solution would be applicable to all Schools.

If testing-out is implemented there are several items where participants expressed concern about a potential negative impact. At least 70% of participants agreed on 10 specific items in the educational area that could be negatively impacted, mainly due to the probable decrease in interpersonal relationships. NCOs with the most experience and knowledge are the ones most likely to test-out of classes. These NCOs would not attend as many classes and, therefore, would not be available to share with other NCOs, either NCOA cadre or other students. NCOA instructors acknowledged they regularly benefit from students who bring current experiences and lessons learned from a host of operational assignments. All officers and NCOs in the more senior duty positions provided the highest agreement that the educational area will potentially suffer the most negative impact.

Besides the educational area, the majority of participants agreed on 13 items in the logistical or administrative areas that could be negatively impacted. They anticipated testing-out would increase the workload requirements for the NCOAs. Tracking NCO attendance and class scheduling would likely be more complicated since NCOs who tested-out of selected classes might join resident courses at different points. Given the diversity of skills required among the different specialties, they were also concerned about establishing and enforcing equitable rules for testing-out. The SFC rank group had a lower level of agreement than the other rank groups on every item in the logistical or administrative areas. The majority of the SFC group only identified 2 of the 13 items as a potential negative impact. While still expressing a generally negative impact, the NCOA leaders and School staff were less in agreement than the other duty positions.

A final area for potential negative impact was sociological. While up to one third of the participants were undecided on some items in this area, a majority of participants identified seven items for consideration. Related to the decrease in interpersonal relationships noted in the educational area, participants recognized there would likely be less networking among NCOs since some NCOs would be spending less time at resident courses. Other items centered on the potential negative stigma or perception that might exist toward NCOs who do not test-out of eligible classes. Participants generally agreed that unit leaders and promotion boards could view this negatively which would adversely affect NCO careers. The combined impact could hurt the esprit-de-corps among NCOs. The senior NCO group and Proponency Office personnel expressed the highest level of agreement on the negative impact.

Participants were very concerned that TRADOC must allocate appropriate resources to Schools in order for them to implement a testing-out program. TRADOC would need to review policies for determining manning requirements at NCOAs. Schools anticipate additional workload on the NCOA personnel, even though there will likely be a decreased number of days that NCOs attend resident courses. The current model of allocating resources based on instructor contact hours does not work under the expected testing-out conditions.

Another point receiving overwhelming agreement from participants was that testing-out should include both written and hands-on components wherever possible. Many technical skills are better assessed through hands-on applications rather than answering questions. As confirmed in previous ARI research (Moriarty and Knapp, 2007), using multiple test methods (e.g., written multiple choice, situational judgment, hands-on) would also provide a more comprehensive and accurate assessment of competence as compared to merely a written test. Some key testing issues were identified by participants.

Actions need to be taken to avoid test compromise. Participants acknowledge that distant learning courses are becoming more prevalent. Soldiers can receive course credit for completing classes and tests via the Internet. Technologies are available to provide test security. However, parallel forms of tests would be necessary to minimize the impact of NCOs sharing tests information. Additionally, testing would most likely need to be conducted in a proctored environment to verify NCO identity.

Just as currently being done for distance learning courses, written tests can be administered via the Internet. The Army must keep in mind, while Internet-delivery of tests is feasible, technology will remain fallible. As experienced in recent ARI research, be prepared for problems (e.g., data loss) due to imperfect Internet connections (Moriarty and Knapp, 2007). Hands-on testing, on the other hand, is not possible via the Internet; it requires that NCOs have access to appropriate hardware and software systems. Making all of the required systems available at various installations is a challenge. Also, while written tests can be computer-graded by a predetermined set of answers, skilled testers are required for hands-on testing.

When Proponent Schools begin developing actual test materials to implement testing-out, they must consider the impacts identified by participants. They should consider the trade-offs between written and hands-on testing with a major challenge being to provide the required equipment wherever hands-on testing-out might occur. They should also keep in mind the need to standardize testing procedures. Schools will need to determine how they could enforce consistent proficiency evaluation between installations. Considerations should certainly include the impact on installations for providing equipment and certified testers. As participants suggested, the NCOA might send a "mobile testing team" from the School to the home stations to conduct testing.

Participants offered suggestions that should be considered if the Army decides to develop a testing-out option for NCOES classes. Either Department of the Army or TRADOC should establish a means to track credits for NCOES content. Establishing this tracking system at a single agency standardizes the process and reduces the requirements at lower levels. As an adjunct to testing-out, the Army should consider implementing prerequisite skill level testing and verification by an independent source prior to NCOES course attendance. This would ensure that all NCOs can begin classes at the same level, thereby minimizing the requirement for NCOA instructors to provide lower level skill training. In addition, a standard common core test could be developed and administered by the U.S. Sergeant Major Academy; successful completion of the test could be a prerequisite for resident NCOES attendance rather than a testing-out option.

Today's Army continues to recognize the value and importance of professional development of NCOs by explicitly linking NCO promotions to NCOES attendance (Department of the Army, 2008a). Participants were adamant that, even if NCOs are able to demonstrate knowledge or skill for some tasks, that resident attendance for portions of NCOES courses was still essential to ensure that the professional interpersonal relations and sharing of experiences needed to occur via resident attendance. The gains and successes in the NCO professional development program should not be compromised. Given the current OE and anticipated future requirements for NCOs, the proper training and education of NCOs should remain a top priority.

Summary

Participants expressed strong agreement on certain aspects of testing-out and awarding NCOES course credit to NCOs.
- The majority (58%) agreed testing-out of selected NCOES classes, such as common core material, is a viable option. Each Proponent School must revise NCOES course content

to make all material relevant and challenging then determine which classes should be allowed for testing-out.

- The majority (61%) agreed experience alone, a job assignment or duty position, should not count for NCOES credit.
- An overwhelming majority (90%) agreed some NCOES content requires resident attendance to foster interpersonal relationships.
- An overwhelming majority (86%) agreed testing-out must require the NCO to demonstrate knowledge and skill via both written and hands-on components.
- An overwhelming majority (85%) agreed that all NCOs, active and reserve, should be handled the same concerning testing-out or receiving equivalent credit.

While testing-out appears to be a viable option to award credit to NCOs for selected NCOES course content, there are potential impacts that need to be addressed prior to implementation.

If more experienced NCOs are allowed to test-out of selected NCOES content, the educational value of the courses could be negatively impacted. Cadre and resident attendees would not benefit from the experiences and lessons learned of these more experienced NCOs. The interpersonal relationships among NCOs could be reduced.

The logistical and administrative workload required of the NCOAs would likely increase, even with a potential reduction in the amount of time NCOs might attend resident courses. Depending on how testing-out is implemented, additional resources would need to be provided to the NCOAs.

While the majority agreed that testing-out could adversely impact NCO esprit-de-corps (61%) and cause potential negative stigmas (77%), perspectives differed by rank group and duty position on specific points. These and other sociological impacts related to perceptions and NCO networking need to be considered prior to implementing testing-out.

Participants offered suggestions for administering testing-out. Written test security via Internet-based testing and employing test proctors was an accepted solution. They were concerned about having the necessary equipment and skilled testers available at home stations to conduct hands-on testing. One suggestion was to have NCOAs send mobile testing teams to installations.

The results from this research clearly show strong support for awarding NCOES credit to NCOs who demonstrate acceptable knowledge and skills. Participants provided numerous potential items that could be negatively impacted if testing-out is implemented. They also offered suggestions for administering testing-out that could mitigate some of these impacts and increase the likelihood of a successful program. This allows decision-makers to consider these items and establish testing-out procedures to mitigate potential pitfalls.

References

Campbell, R. C., Knapp, D. J. & Heffner, T. S. (2005). *Planning for the future: Progress toward an NCO competency assessment program.* (ARI Special Report 61). Alexandria, VA: U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences. (DTIC No. ADA444464)

Campbell, R. C., Knapp, D. J. & Heffner, T. S. (2002). *Selection for leadership: Transforming NCO promotion.* (ARI Special Report 52). Alexandria, VA: U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences. (DTIC No. ADA407790)

Department of the Army. (2007). *2007 US Army Posture Statement.* Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved September 15, 2008 from, http://www.army.mil/aps/07/addendum/h.html

Department of the Army. (2008a). *2008 US Army Posture Statement.* Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved September 15, 2008 from, http://www.army.mil/aps/08/addenda/addenda_e.html

Department of the Army. (1981). *Personnel – General: Enlisted Personnel Management System (EPMS)* (AR 600-200). Washington, DC: Author.

Department of the Army. (2008b). *Personnel – General: Enlisted promotions and reductions* (AR 600-8-19). Washington, DC: Author.

Department of the Army. (2005). *Promotion eligibility and NCOES.* (MILPER message number: 05-261). Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved September 15, 2008 from, http://www.armystudyguide.com/cgi-bin/moxiebin/bm_tools.cgi?print=2818;s=25_10;site=1

Department of the Army. (2003). *Promotion procedural guidance for suspension of conditional enlisted promotions – sergeant through sergeant first class.* (MILPER message number: 04-037). Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved September 15, 2008 from, http://www.armystudyguide.com/content/MILPER_Messages_Archive/promotion_milper_messages/promotion-procedural-guid.shtml

Elder, D. K. (1999). *Educating Noncommissioned Officers: A chronological study on the development of educational programs for U.S. Army Noncommissioned Officers.* Fort Riley, KS. Retrieved September 15, 2008 from, http://www.ncohistory.com

Knapp, D. J., Heffner, T. S. & Campbell, R. C. (2003). *Recommendations for an Army NCO semi-centralized promotion system for the 21st century.* (ARI Research Report 1807). Alexandria, VA: U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences. (DTIC No. ADA415686)

Moriarty, K. O. & Knapp, D. J. (2007). *Army enlisted personnel competency assessment program: Phase III pilot tests.* (ARI Technical Report 1198). Alexandria, VA: U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences. (DTIC No. ADA465808)

Acronyms

1SG	First Sergeant
ANCOC	Advanced Noncommissioned Officer Course
APFT	Army Physical Fitness Test
ARFORGEN	Army Force Generation
ARI	U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences
BNCOC	Basic Noncommissioned Officer Course
CDR	Commander
CPT	Captain
CSM	Command Sergeant Major
KSA	Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities
LTC	Lieutenant Colonel
MILPER	Military Personnel Center
MOS	Military Occupational Specialty
MTT	Mobile Training Team
NCO	Noncommissioned Officer
NCOA	NCO Academy
NCOER	NCO Evaluation Report
NCOES	Noncommissioned Officer Education System
OE	Operating Environment
OEF	Operation Enduring Freedom
OIF	Operation Iraqi Freedom
POC	Point of Contact
POI	Program of Instruction
RC	Reserve Component
SFC	Sergeant First Class
SGI	Small-Group Instructor
SSG	Staff Sergeant
TRADOC	U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command
TTP	Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures

APPENDIX A

Survey Form

Privacy Act Statement

This project is gathering input from knowledgeable individuals to assess the possibility of awarding an NCO credit for portions of professional education courses based on testing and/or life experiences. This project is part of the official research mission of the U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences (ARI) (10 U.S. Code 2358). Although individual input is being collected in the survey forms, your individual responses for this project will not be reported to anyone in your chain of command, will not be placed in your personnel file, and will in no way impact your Army career. All of the input gathered for this project will be combined and presented in a collective format to personnel at Headquarters Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC). Your individual input is anonymous and will remain confidential. Only members of the research team will have access to individual input forms. While your participation is voluntary, gathering the most meaningful input requires the participation of Soldiers like you. Despite the importance of your participation, you will experience no adverse effect for not providing any information requested. Thank you for your participation and input.

Purpose of Survey and Instructions

Many NCOs have not been able to attend their appropriate NCOES course at the right time in their career, due to deployments and OPTEMPO. NCOs are also taking on increased responsibilities due to the nature of missions in the Contemporary Operating Environment. Based on these factors, TRADOC has asked ARI to examine the possibilities and impacts of allowing NCOs to receive credit for some or all of their NCOES classes based on testing or life experiences. Your thoughts and opinions will help TRADOC develop innovative options for improving the NCOES process.

Throughout this survey, "testing-out" refers to some form of formal test (e.g., written or hands-on) that must be completed to a specified level of performance. "Equivalent credit" means receiving NCOES academic recognition based on real life accomplishments or experiences (e.g., duty assignment or military performance). The term CLEP is used to imply both "testing-out" and "equivalent credit", unless stated otherwise. [Note: In the civilian realm, CLEP traditionally stands for College Level Examination Program and Credit for Life Experience Program.]

Since BNCOC courses vary by MOS and some are under revision, as you complete this survey please consider a generic BNCOC POI that could be used for any MOS.

A-2

Biographical Information

1. Rank (circle one; if retired military, circle rank and write RET)

   COL   LTC   MAJ   CPT   CSM   SGM   MSG   1SG   SFC   SSG   Civilian   Other _____

2. MOS/ Branch: _____   3. Time in Service (military and civilian): ____ years ____ months

4. Current Position: _____   5. Time in Current Position: ____ years _____ months

6. Training Assignments (e.g., MCCC instructor, DS, BNCOC instructor)

_____

_____

7. Personnel Management Experience (e.g., Co Cdr, 1SG, S-1)

_____

_____

8. Combat Experience:
   a. Total # months in OIF/OEF _____ months
   b. Duty position(s) in OIF/OEF _____

   _____

   c. Other (e.g., Kosovo, Bosnia) _____

   _____

I. Please rate each of the following items – check the block that best describes your opinion. Blank lines are provided for write-ins.

Should the Army implement CLEP?	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. An NCO should be able to "test-out" of certain subjects taught in BNCOC.					
2. An NCO should have the opportunity to "test-out" of BNCOC.					
3. An NCO should receive "equivalent credit" for certain BNCOC classes based on experience.					
4. An NCO should receive "equivalent credit" for all of BNCOC based on experience.					
5. The NCOER should allow raters to award NCOES credit to an NCO.					
6. Company chain of command should be allowed to award NCOES credit.					
7. Battalion chain of command should be allowed to award NCOES credit.					
8. Brigade chain of command should be allowed to award NCOES credit.					
9. Combat experience should count toward NCOES credit.					
10. All BNCOC classes should be mandatory for all NCOs.					
11. BNCOC should focus on *leadership* skills needed for higher grade level.					
12. BNCOC should focus on *technical* skills needed for higher grade level.					
13. There should be Skill Level 1 & 2 testing prior to BNCOC attendance.					
14. If "testing-out" is implemented, it should be done at home-station.					
15. If "testing-out" is implemented, it should be a written test.					
16. If "testing-out" is implemented, it should be a hands-on test.					
17. If "testing-out" is implemented, it should include both written and hands-on testing.					
18. RC NCOs should be handled the same as active duty NCOs.					
19. Some classes are so crucial that no CLEP should be allowed.					
20. Each School should determine what can be CLEPed and how.					
21.					
22.					

Comments (please specify the item # from above):

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

A-4

II. Rate how much <u>Logistical / Administrative</u> area could be impacted by CLEP – check one block for each item (impact could be in terms of resources, workload, difficulties, etc.). Blank lines are provided for write-ins.

Logistical / Administrative areas that could be impacted	Very Positive Impact	Positive					Negative				Very Negative Impact
	5	4	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	4	5
1. Tracking individual NCO class attendance											
2. Utilizing student time when not in class											
3. Conducting in/out processing											
4. Administering tests (e.g., location/control/security/time/resources)											
5. Administering equivalent credit (e.g. rules/who approves/tracking)											
6. Creating CLEP tests and grading scales											
7. Determining what classes can be tested-out											
8. Determining what classes can be skipped based on equivalent credit											
9. Awarding credit for common core / common skills classes											
10. Awarding credit for branch and/or MOS-specific classes											
11. Determining class standing when NCO attends only part of classes											
12. Scheduling courses / classes / exercises											
13. Determining NCO Academy staffing requirements											
14. Tracking individual NCO classes that are CLEPed											
15. Justifying or defending CLEP decisions											
16. Maintaining accurate personnel records											
17.											
18.											

Comments (please specify the item # from above):

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

A-5

III. Rate how much Educational areas could be impacted by CLEP – check one block for each item (impact could be in terms of resources, workload, difficulties, etc.). Blank lines are provided for write-ins.

Educational areas that could be impacted	Very Positive Impact	Impact Positive ←				Negative →				Very Negative Impact
	5	4	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	4	5
1. Verifying that NCO actually possesses required skill to skip class / course											
2. Ensuring that civilian education does not preclude need to acquire military skill											
3. Enhancing professional development through peer interaction											
4. Ensuring that all NCOs attend crucial classes											
5. Sharing of experience and ideas among resident students											
6. Sharing of lessons learned among resident students											
7. Sharing of experience and ideas between instructors and students											
8. Collaborating among students (e.g., study groups)											
9. Enhancing the learning process through peer coaching											
10. Benefiting from learning in a social setting											
11. Updating NCOs on latest doctrine / TTP											
12. Updating NCOs on new equipment and organization changes											
13. Obtaining student ideas for improving courses / classes											
14.											
15.											

Comments (please specify the item # from above):

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

IV. Rate how much <u>Sociological</u> areas could be impacted by CLEP – check one block for each item (impact could be in terms of resources, workload, difficulties, etc.).

Sociological areas that could be impacted.	Very Positive Impact	Positive					Negative				Very Negative Impact
	5	4	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	4	5
1. Potential stigma of an NCO who is unable to CLEP a class or course											
2. NCO professional development ribbon (modify to indicate CLEP?)											
3. Rating chain perceptions of NCO technical and tactical competence											
4. Selection of NCOs for joint / special assignments											
5. Promotion board perceptions of NCO technical and tactical competence											
6. Esprit de corps among NCOs											
7. Unit practices regarding utilization and retention of NCOs											
8. Unit practices regarding troop or staff duty assignments											
9. Networking among NCOs											
10. Unit cohesion											
11. NCO likelihood of staying in Army											
12.											
13.											
14.											
15.											

Comments (please specify the item # from above):

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

V. Indicate your agreement with each of the following items – check the block that best describes your opinion. Blank lines are provided for write-ins.

Factors to be considered for awarding "equivalent credit"	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. Combat tours					
2. Leadership position in combat					
3. Leadership position in troop unit					
4. Leadership position in TDA assignment					
5. Leadership position in staff assignment					
6. Civilian education					
7. Awards / decorations					
8. NCOER evaluation					
9. Recommendation by company-level chain of command					
10. Recommendation by battalion-level chain of command					
11. Recommendation by brigade-level chain of command					
12. Military school attendance (non-NCOES)					
13. Duty as a Drill Sergeant / Instructor					
14. Short tour / duty with Mobile Training Team (MTT)					
15.					
16.					
17.					
18.					

Comments (please specify the item # from above):

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

VI. Indicate your agreement with each of the following items – check the block that best describes your opinion. Blank lines are provided for write-ins.

If an NCO CLEPs a class, he/she should spend that time:	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. Completing on-line classes					
2. Off / free to do as preferred (as a reward)					
3. Coaching / assisting peers					
4. Participating in professional development sessions with others who CLEPed out					
5. Completing additional work/research (class rank consideration)					
6. Assisting instructors in class presentation					
7. Observing other training events on post (BCT range ops, simulations)					
8. Participating in activities determined by each School					
9.					
10.					
11.					
12.					
13.					
14.					
15.					

Comments (please specify the item # from above):

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

ARI PT #61-45

APPENDIX B

Memorandum for Record

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
U.S. ARMY RESEARCH INSTITUTE FOR THE BEHAVIORAL AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
INSTITUTIONAL TRAINING RESEARCH UNIT
POST OFFICE BOX 52086
FORT BENNING, GA 31995-2086

REPLY TO
ATTENTION OF

DAPE-ARI-IJ   10 December 2007

MEMORANDUM FOR RECORD

SUBJECT: Execution of FY 2008 Investigation of the Importance of Individual Experience and Knowledge as Part of an Overall Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO) Development Strategy

1. The purpose of this memorandum for record (MFR) is to specify the roles and functions of the U. S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences (ARI) and the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) Leader Development and Education Directorate (LDD), in the execution of an approved research investigation of the importance of individual experience and knowledge as part of an overall NCO development strategy.

2. TRADOC, LDD will sponsor the analysis and will have overall oversight in its execution. ARI, ITRU will conduct the investigation and provide a report of its findings.

3. The reference for this investigation is a TRADOC (ODCSOPS&T) 2007 Request for an ARI Research-Based Personnel and Training Study or Analysis, entitled *Evaluating the best practices to account for individual experience and knowledge as part of an overall NCO Development Strategy*.

4. TRADOC requested ARI's assistance in investigating the viability of various methods to test out of, or provide constructive credit for, selected institutional course content, based on an individual's knowledge and experience.

5. Understandings, agreements, support, and resources.

    a. TRADOC, LDD will:

        (1) Approve the Research Plan.

        (2) As outlined in the Research Plan, notify selected TRADOC Schools that ARI will conduct an investigation and request their assistance in support of the subject research above.

        (3) Provide access to course managers, program of instruction (POI) materials, and other instructional personnel as specified in the Research Plan.

DAPE-ARI-IJ

SUBJECT: Execution of FY 2008 Investigation of the Importance of Individual Experience and Knowledge as Part of an Overall NCO Development Strategy

(4) Provide comments on government data collection instruments, research products, and interim findings as required or requested.

(5) Ensure ARI is informed of, or included in, relevant TRADOC meetings and briefings on the subject topic and related TRADOC initiatives (e.g., test security in Army Career Tracker).

(6) Appoint Mr. Jonathan F. Rhodes, TRADOC, LDD, (DSN 680-5744 or commercial 757-788-5744) as principal point of contact for this investigation.

   b.   ARI, will:

(1) Develop and execute a Research Plan.

(2) Conduct all data collection and analysis activities in accordance with the Research Plan.

(3) Provide periodic updates of research progress to TRADOC, LDD.

(4) Document research results in briefings and provide a final written report. The final ARI report will identify the advantages and disadvantages, both individual and institutional, of using knowledge and experience criteria as part of an overall NCO development strategy and make recommendations for the way ahead.

(5) Appoint Dr. Kenneth L. Evans, ARI, ITRU (DSN 835-2565 or commercial 706-545-2565) as principal ARI point of contact for this investigation and Dr. Kathy Quinkert, ARI, TRADOC (DSN 680-5623 or commercial 757-788-5623) as alternate.

6. The agreements in this MFR become effective on the date it is signed by the parties below and will terminate on 31 December 08, unless modified by mutual agreement.

signed	signed
CHARLES V. ROGERSON	SCOTT E. GRAHAM, Ph.D.
COL, FA	Chief, ARI Institutional Training
Director, Leader Development	Research Unit
and Education (LDD)	

11 December 2007	12 December 2007
Date	Date