

Any Time

Transforming Training Through the Increased Use of Distance Learning

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This article is a reprint from *MILITARY POLICE*, April 2003.

“The delivery of standardized individual, collective, and self-development training to soldiers and units anywhere and anytime through the application of information technologies.”

—The U.S. Army definition of distributed learning

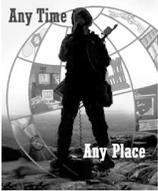
The Strategic Plan for Transforming DOD Training, 1 March 2002, recognizes that “transformed training” is the key enabler to transforming the Department of Defense. An essential component for transforming training is the increased use of distance learning methodologies.

In some form or other, distance learning has been an alternative to the traditional classroom for many years. The term *distance learning* was coined by Otto Peters and other practitioners at the University of Tübingen in the 1960s.¹ The term has evolved to *distance education* and most recently *distributed learning* (DL). As early as the 1940s, the U.S. military began employing print-based correspondence courses. Other media delivery used by the military through the years included television; “teleteaching,” which used commercial dial-up telephones; electronic blackboards; and more recently, personal computers. In November 1997, the Distance Learning/Training Technology Applications Subcommittee of the Secretary of the Army’s Education Committee was established to review and evaluate the status of DL within Army training. In a June 1999 briefing to the Secretary of the Army,² the subcommittee recommended that the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) adopt the Internet as The Army Distributed Learning Program (TADLP) distribution backbone, enabling training to be Web-centric in the long term. The subcommittee also added that the Army must use CD-ROMs as a convenient, necessary interim measure while transitioning to the Web. This article provides an update on the status of DL development at the U.S. Army Maneuver Support Center (MANSCEN) Directorate of Training Development (DOTD), Fort Leonard Wood,

Missouri, and more specifically, near-term plans for implementing the DL courseware being developed.

During the stand-up of MANSCEN, senior leaders recognized that DL would play a major role in future Army Transformation processes and opted to establish a Multimedia Development Team (MDT) within DOTD. The DOTD MDT has the responsibility to conduct MANSCEN DL contract oversight for contractor-developed courseware, develop selected in-house multimedia products, and upgrade legacy MANSCEN school courseware. The MDT staff is comprised of instructional designers, training technicians, a visual information specialist, and a computer scientist specifically trained to facilitate courseware development at MANSCEN.

To establish the MDT workload, the MANSCEN schools’ courseware redesign and development requests are reviewed by MDT and approved by DOTD. Course priorities are determined, based on a careful review of the TRADOC TADLP courseware redesign list published each fiscal year. TRADOC schools may at any time nominate courses to be added to the redesign list. Course nominations are reviewed at TRADOC and prioritized reflecting the Army’s strategic needs. Courses accepted on the list are the Army’s top priority for DL course redesign. TRADOC allocates DL funds on a priority basis to redesign about forty courses per year. Once the DOTD MDT annual course redesign and development requirements are established, a decision is made whether to conduct some of the funded courseware development work in-house (by requesting a waiver from TRADOC) or to proceed with contracting the work to one of the TRADOC courseware



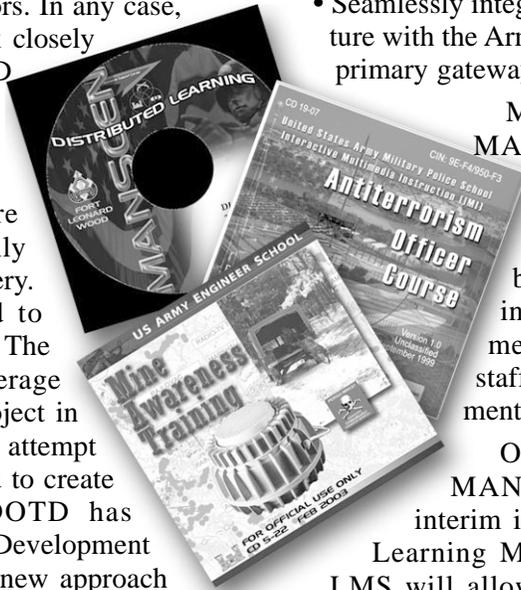
development contractors. In any case, MDT personnel work closely with MANSCEN DOTD Warrior and school training developers throughout each phase of the development.

Early MANSCEN courseware development efforts were primarily targeted for CD-ROM-based delivery. In 2002, the emphasis changed to developing Web-based courseware. The time required to complete an average forty-hour DL course redesign project in TRADOC is 24-30 months.³ In an attempt to reduce the overall time required to create courseware at MANSCEN, DOTD has implemented a Rapid Courseware Development Model (RCDM). This model is a new approach not currently used by other TRADOC schools. We requested and received approval to augment the in-house MDT with personnel contracted to develop Instructional Media Design Packages and storyboards on-site under the close watch of MDT. This approach uses highly skilled contracted instructional designers and writers working alongside the in-house MDT, allowing them to be able to redesign and develop 100 hours of interactive courseware this fiscal year. We believe the DOTD RCDM will prove to be a very successful initiative to reduce interactive courseware development time.

Having a reliable, proven avenue for DL implementation is just as important as courseware development. We must have a method and procedures for delivering the completed courseware and providing the essential support that students require in order to have a successful experience with DL. To that end, we developed what we are calling the MANSCEN Advanced Distributed Learning University (ADLU), a three-phased (crawl-walk-run) implementation plan for DL. The overall mission of the ADLU includes—

- Providing the infrastructure and support to facilitate individual, collective, and self-development training anywhere and any time.
- Leveraging cutting-edge DL technologies and methodologies to provide soldiers a lifelong learning experience in a positive, effective, cost-efficient, stimulating, and motivating environment that supports Army Transformation.
- Improving individual and unit readiness.
- Supporting Army DL initiatives.

- Seamlessly integrating the MANSCEN infrastructure with the Army Knowledge Online as the primary gateway to MANSCEN DL.



Major General R.L. Van Antwerp, MANSCEN commander, approved the MANSCEN ADLU Implementation Plan in October 2002, with the first phase of the plan being a test of our student support infrastructure, as well as establishment of the MANSCEN help desk, staffing roles, responsibilities, requirements, and operating procedures.

One of the key components of the MANSCEN ADLU student support interim infrastructure is the DOTD Aspen Learning Management System (LMS). The LMS will allow MANSCEN ADLU students a means to access MANSCEN courseware online. TRADOC is in the process of establishing an objective learning management system (OLMS). When it is fully functional, we will transition to the OLMS. Courses developed to TRADOC's established standards will be compatible with either system. An LMS/OLMS allows us to track such things as student enrollment, student progress, course completion, and student success (test scores).

The MANSCEN ADLU pilot is not only designed for success, but our intent is to harvest valuable experiential data on how best to implement an ADLU at Fort Leonard Wood. To that end, an operations council and a strategic council (council of colonels) will be used to develop, execute, monitor, and review the ADLU pilot. The strategic council, chaired by the DOTD, will—

- Identify the goals and the overall direction for the pilot and subsequent phases.
- Establish and staff the operations council.
- Represent the interests of the MANSCEN schools' commandants (to be represented by the Directors of Training from the Chemical, Engineer, and Military Police Schools) and the Noncommissioned Officers Academy commandant.
- Provide resource recommendations for the ADLU follow-on phases.

The operations council, chaired by the Chief of the Multimedia Development Division, DOTD, will—

- Monitor and manage the ADLU pilot and subsequent phases.
- Actively review and examine the post-pilot results to harvest lessons learned and incorporate them into the subsequent ADLU phases.



- Coordinate student participation for courses identified in the ADLU pilot plan.
- Recommend ADLU improvements and changes to the strategic council.

The first “window of opportunity” for the test or pilot phase of the ADLU Plan is the April-June 2003 time frame. Courseware scheduled for testing includes the—

- 12B10 (Reclass) Combat Engineer Training.
- Nuclear, Biological, Chemical Defense Course.
- Military Police Total Army Training System
Advanced Noncommissioned Officers Course.

Our plan is to fully test the infrastructure by including courses for all three proponent schools and students from a variety of locations using various technology levels of automation equipment (varying bandwidths and computer configurations). Such a plan requires a considerable amount of coordination and decision-making. We are currently coordinating with the proponent schools to provide e-mentors/instructors, the National Guard Bureau to provide students for the pilot, the Directorate of Information Management to establish help telephone lines, the Directorate of Common Leader Training to develop a one-day e-mentor instruction class, and Army Training Requirements and Resources System personnel to ensure that students receive the appropriate credit for the courses they complete. During the pilot phase, a help desk will be manned 12 hours a day, 7 days a week to provide course assistance. The e-mentors/

instructors will be trained to provide basic technical assistance to the students in addition to their subject matter expertise.

At the conclusion of the ADLU pilot phase, the strategic council and the operations council will analyze data collected, based on preestablished goals and success metrics, and formulate lessons learned and ADLU resource requirements from the experience. These lessons learned and recommended improvements and changes will be carried forward to the next MANSCEN ADLU implementation phase.

Endnotes

¹ M. Moore and G. Kearsley, *Distance Education: A Systems View*. Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1996.

² A. Chute and H. Mehlinger, *Reportout of the Distance Learning/Training Technology Applications Subcommittee to the Secretary of the Army*. Washington, D.C., June 1999.

³ U.S. Army Audit Agency, Audit Report: A:2002-XXX-FFF. *Courseware Development for Distance Learning*, 18 July 2002, p.1.

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U.S. Army Maneuver Support Center. *Advanced Distributed Learning University Plan (Phase I) for MANSCEN*. Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, 2000.

U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command. *Army Distance Learning Plan*. Fort Monroe, Virginia, 1996.

Wisher, R., Sabol, M., and Moses, F. *Distance Learning: The Soldier's Perspective*. U.S. Army Research Institute Special Report 49, 2002.

UPDATE: *The pilot phase of the ADLU Plan was conducted as scheduled with some success. The establishment of a student base was challenging because of the ongoing Operation Iraqi Freedom. We ended up with a much smaller number of students than we envisioned, but we still gained invaluable experience and collected data to guide the follow-on phases of the MANSCEN ADLU program. During the pilot, we were able to fully test our LMS and identify associated problems, and we got a much more realistic concept of the resources required to implement DL. The after-action report for the pilot is currently being finalized.*

Following completion of the pilot phase, a decision was made to transition responsibility for the execution of the ADLU Implementation Plan from DOTD to the Directorate of Common Leader Training (DCLT). The handover date for that action was 15 July 2003, and DCLT is in the process of developing a strategy for conducting the follow-on phases.