



# 81st Training Wing

## Enhancing curriculum for warfighter support

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KEESLER AIR FORCE BASE, Miss. — With the reopening of the Air Force Communications Officer Training schoolhouse in March, the 333rd Training Squadron took a large step toward changing the face of technical training for the communications and information career field. However, the overhaul of AFCOT is only part of a long-term effort to improve the effectiveness of both officer training and C4I systems training courses provided by the 333rd TRS.

Only through an aggressive, improving program of instruction can we provide officer and enlisted C&I professionals the education needed to participate in ongoing development and implementation of Net Centric Warfare. Those of us providing that education must continuously improve our courses. We've accomplished the rewrite of officer courses, and are currently rewriting or editing more than half the courses in the Advanced C4I Training Flight, including System Network Support, COMSEC/EMSEC and GCCS courses.

We are taking steps to ensure we stay in touch with people in the field, keeping our course developers and instructors in ongoing dialogue with front-line communicators. AFPC tells us who to train; AETC and our instructors decide how to train; but only the people in the field can tell us what we need to train. We make personal contact with commanders and superintendents as part of our daily routine, and use feedback to drive course improvements. We work hand-in-hand with agencies such as DISA to receive beta versions of the latest GCCS software to ensure our new course will teach the field what it needs to know, exactly when it needs the new information.

We've also changed the way we assess the effectiveness of our courses.

In the past, we surveyed former students six months after graduation to assess how well the course material prepared them for what they're actually doing in the field. Now we've cut that to 90 days after graduation and are gathering feedback from both former students and their chain of command. This improves students' chances of effectively comparing course content to actual duties and

adds qualitative feedback from those best able to assess whether or not we prepared the students for their jobs—their supervisors and commanders.

We're also improving our dialogue with the Air Staff and Joint Staff. Policy changes working their way through the Pentagon today will have significant impact on operations and, subsequently, what we need to teach 12 months from now. Improving our interaction with policy makers enhances our ability to have updated course material ready when the policies are implemented. This not only ensures the students get relevant information, but helps avoid the most hated phrase in the history of training, "I know it's not the way it's done in the field, but that's what you'll be tested on."

All of this, of course, is part of our overarching need to keep the curriculum relevant. A new generation of computer technology—the lifeblood of our career field—hits the street on average every 24 months. We must adapt and improve course content at least as fast or become obsolete.

The next AFCOT Utilization and Training Workshop is scheduled for October, during which we will lay out the direction of AFCOT for the next 12-18 months. We're relying on commanders in the field to provide the right mix of subject matter experts—officer, civilian and enlisted—to attend this session and define what our C&I officer corps needs to learn.

Finally, one last thought on the officer side of training. As a community, we're notorious for being techno-geeks and focusing on technical details. However, in today's world of expeditionary operations we must strive to ensure our officers' training does not ignore this basic fact—as officers, we are leaders first and communicators second. We must embed in all of our technical training an understanding of not only how to provide C&I, but how to lead our enlisted people as they provide C&I.

With your help, we will stay connected to the field, stay ahead of policy changes and keep our curriculum relevant. For the 333rd TRS, the customer is every Airman in our career field. They are among the most capable and respected C&I professionals in the world today. By providing the C&I education needed to support the expeditionary Air Force, we intend to keep it that way. (Lt. Col. Randy Coats, 333rd TRS/DO, contributed to this article.)

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