

A Different Perspective on Teaching Downrange

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In his update on the Memoirs Project at the online meeting on June 5th, Julian mentioned the need for more reports on teaching students. The following fits that bill, I think, though I'm not sure that it qualifies for the Memoirs Project as it is not a personal memoir. Nevertheless, it does throw light on an interesting aspect of the UMUC downrange program and might thus be used in another context, or simply filed in the archives.

Many of our downrange faculty were recruited in-country from members of the U.S. Military with postgraduate degrees serving in that part of the world. As assistant dean, I had the pleasure of overseeing such faculty—I communicated with them by telephone and email, never having the opportunity to visit classes downrange myself. Two such faculty members were Andrew Mawdsley (GVPT) and Shawn Hughes (BMGT), who taught for UMUC in Al Asad, Iraq.

I remember talking with Andrew about his GVPT100 classes and his saying that he always started with a fundamental question: **Why are we here?** (i.e. in Iraq) Having grabbed his students' attention with this opener, he then developed an overview of US political institutions and government posts—with the aim of helping them understand possible answers to his question.

The following newspaper article, which I reproduced in the June 2009 issue of the UMUC Europe *Faculty Newsletter*, was originally published in the *Jacksonville Daily News*. Unfortunately, the original link that I used in the *Newsletter* no longer functions, and checking the *Jacksonville Daily News* website, I see that there are several gaps in the archives, to include for 2009. So I cannot even date the article more accurately than sometime in the first half of that year.

Leading Marines on the battlefield, teaching Marines in the classroom

By Gunnery Sgt. Reina Barnett

AL ASAD AIR BASE, Iraq – Deployed service members easily work 12-to-14-hour days. Sometimes they leave the wire, and most of the time they're out in the sweltering heat. Why then, do some men and women choose to continue their already rigorous workload with schoolwork? Because knowledge is power.

1st Lt. Andrew Mawdsley, a supply officer with Marine Aviation Logistics Squadron 26, doesn't mind it though. In fact, he thrives on it. Knowledge is indeed power, Mawdsley tells his students. The young lieutenant teaches International Political Relations, International Terrorism, American Foreign Relations and Introduction to Political Science at the education office for the University of Maryland University College aboard Al Asad Air Base, Iraq. Currently, he is wrapping up a session on International Political Relations. Although Mawdsley considers American Foreign Relations his specialty, he's had some unique opportunities, allowing him to teach much more than one subject.

"I had a unique opportunity to study under some incredible professionals from the State Department, the CIA, and academia. All [of those people] had experience with foreign policymaking," Mawdsley says, "Which gave me great insight into our country's relations abroad and diplomacy apparatus."

This is Mawdsley's first deployment, and having arrived in Iraq just a few months ago, he hit the ground running, finding out where he could be most useful to those

around him and those who share the same desire to learn about international relations.

"The Marine Corps afforded me the opportunity to take a scholarship immediately after commissioning. I saw teaching Marines as a great opportunity to give back," says Mawdsley. A graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy, Mawdsley furthered his education at the George H.W. Bush School of Government and Public Service at Texas A&M.

This educator wants to continue to teach more and different classes while he's deployed. If given the opportunity, he'd also love to go back to the Naval Academy and teach political science.

"My faith drives me to pursue growth and excellence in all endeavors. Teaching and personal learning are just two parts of that lifelong goal."

Another Marine from MALS-26, Maj. Shawn Hughes, the operations officer for the squadron, also moonlights as a teacher. Hughes teaches business and management courses with UMUC. Hughes brings with him a vast array of knowledge and teaching experience, having served as an instructor for Navy Right and Responsibilities at the Petty Officer Indoctrination School. Hughes was also the senior Marine instructor at the Aircraft Maintenance Officer School and has taught courses in Aircraft Weight and Balance and Ground Operations for Central Texas College.

Hughes considers leadership and management his areas of expertise because, as he says, "Those are my specialties as a Marine." After completing several deployments, Hughes says he considers teaching deployed service members a part of his obligation. "I attended classes at night and off-duty on the weekends; I know how hard it can be. I struggled. If I have the opportunity to help others obtain a higher education with a more manageable workload, I should."

Both Mawdsley and Hughes enjoy teaching military members.

"In applying to and going through graduate school, it was always said that people in the military had a lot to contribute to class discussions. That is undoubtedly the case in my class, as each student has a diverse background that allows them to contribute to collective learning in a different way," says Mawdsley. The wide range of opinions contributes to what Mawdsley calls the richness of the classroom environment. Something, he says, you can't get from an online course.

Hughes knows how difficult a deployed education can be and he applauds the efforts of his students. Taking classes while deployed makes sense, he says, if people have a flexible enough schedule. Hughes adds, if a person can form good study and time management habits while deployed, taking courses back home will be that much easier and should be less daunting. However, Hughes notes, there are potential roadblocks to this learning environment.

"Pay grades among the military members in a classroom can be an issue. Many people don't feel comfortable discussing subjects across the pay grades; that is why my students and I take our blouses off as soon as we enter the classroom." That simple action, he says, equalizes everyone for the time we are in class.

The diversity of experiences brought in by each student makes for interesting classroom conversations.

Chief Petty Officer Matthew Altekruise, the bulk fuel contract officer representative with the Navy Petroleum Detachment aboard Al Asad, is one of Mawdsley's students

"I have learned that international issues are just as fragile and important as our own domestic ones," he says. "I've also learned a great deal of our own history through

researching and discussing classroom topics. I have a great deal of respect for our nation's history and have a thirst to learn even more."

This is exactly what Mawdsley talks about when he says we, as members of the military, have a vested interest in what happens not only in our country, but globally.

"People in the military have a direct role in the execution of foreign policy," Mawdsley points out, "For instance; we're all here in Iraq right now because of decisions made by the Bush administration six years ago." Once students recognize this, Mawdsley believes they are more engaged to understand the how and why of foreign policymaking.

Perhaps this is why not only these two instructors spend six to nine hours a week in the classroom, but their students pack the classrooms of the education office as well. Continuing your education, Hughes says, is one of the best ways to ensure you're able to adapt to this ever-changing environment.

"In every learning environment that I've been a part of, I learn as much, if not more, from the students of the class than they learn from me. A thought-provoking discussion is a powerful thing," Hughes says. "The biggest benefit as an educator is meeting and interacting with some absolutely amazing people whom I wouldn't get to meet otherwise," says Hughes. "I walk away from every class better for having been a part of it. I consider myself successful only if the students can say the same."

The Marine Corps plays a vital role in guiding these leaders of Marines into the classroom and sharing their passions...their knowledge.

"The Marine Corps has put me in situations where I can learn and grow as a leader. I've learned a lot in my short time in the fleet, some from self-reflection, some from others and some from the situations in which I've been placed. Leadership is very important," says Mawdsley. "I view it as a muscle," he says. "I try to recognize every situation for its value in my growth as a leader." Mawdsley says he recognized that teaching for hours each night would positively influence his ability to lead others.

"The Marine Corps has helped me by instilling leadership traits, the desire to improve myself and to help others do the same," says Hughes.

In the same spirit of their civilian counterparts, these educators and Marine leaders are helping people gain a greater understanding of the world we live in. They are the mentors who equip us with the knowledge they possess, so that we too can pass it on for generations to come.