ENHANCING IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT AT SENIOR SERVICE COLLEGES

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Army senior Professional Military Education (PME) includes the Senior Service College (SSC) resident and distance programs, along with fellowships at universities and agencies within the United States and abroad. SSCs are responsible for aiding in the transition of officers from the mid-level to the senior levels of command, leadership, and management. As the saying goes, "Colonels run the Army." The transition is significant; in addition to scaling up the technical expertise and know-how to get things done within higher-level commands and staff headquarters, senior leaders also assume guardianship of the Army profession, which includes both greater personal and professional responsibilities, and greater scrutiny over their actions and decisions by those inside and outside the Service.

In addition to gaining skills and acquiring knowledge, moving from mid-career to senior leader requires a transition of one's professional identity. The transition involves the letting go of one's mid-career persona and adoption of a new persona, encapsulating values and dispositions expected of senior leaders to be able to operate in, and cope with, the strategic environment. It constitutes a personal journey from one level of leadership to another, and results in one's ability to apply such skills and knowledge in future situations. It is also not an optional journey, as the failure to adopt and internalize those higher-order values and dispositions are directly linked to various destructive and unethical behaviors that the joint community wishes to avoid.

Unfortunately, identity development gets short shrift in PME in general and SSCs in particular. The inculcation of professional values, resiliency, and critical and reflective thought are essential to properly operationalizing the skills and knowledge learned in SSCs; but these are all-around highly subjective, difficult to measure, and therefore difficult to develop educational activities. New policies for officer and civilian professional education include provisions for developing leaders, such as the recent inclusion of six Desired Leader Attributes (DLAs) in the 2015 E version of the the Joint instruction, *Officer Professional Military Education Policy* (OPMEP), but it remains unclear how to operationalize those goals in curriculum development.

A 2014 initiative at the U.S. Army War College (USAWC) offers a potential model. A presentation of eight "role identities" as a descriptive tool to help SSC students understand how their PME would be applied in their future duties as senior leaders was included early in the USAWC curriculum. Short narratives of these role identities have helped orient students on the transitions they are expected to undertake and how they might cope with the strategic environment they are about to enter. Through the role identity metaphor, the goal was to situate the students in the positions of current and past senior leaders, helping them better appreciate the decisions and activities those leaders undertook so as to ease their own transitions. The initiative had some success, but it currently does not satisfy the overall need for fully incorporating identity development into the program. The purpose of this Letort Paper is to examine the overall challenges associated with identity development and propose an expansion of the USAWC initiative for broader application across SSCs.

This Letort Paper is organized as follows: First, it defines several avoidable problems associated with the failure to properly develop identities among

senior leaders and presents the case for a greater inclusion of identity development in SSCs. These include senior leaders who: are passively compliant rather than communicating with courage or taking risks with decisive action; fail to dissociate from mid-career attitudes and behaviors that may be disadvantageous for making well-informed decisions on highly complex matters; incur undue stress and health problems; or, succumb to ethical failure due to an inability to cope with the added responsibilities of senior leadership.

Second, various identity-related ideas and models are discussed from educational literature, as other professions have wrestled with similar challenges. From this emerges the construct of the role identity as a viable choice for expressing the attitudes and dispositions desired in the context of the SSC students' future requirements as senior leaders. The role identity is a metaphor that situates the students in the shoes of senior leaders, looking at challenges and decisions from the student's perspective.

The elements of the 2014 initiative are discussed third, in which eight role identities are described that satisfy the problems expressed and address the goals of new PME policies. These role identities were derived by examining the aforementioned problems and the requirements and expectations of senior leaders in practice. The eight identities are divided into two sets. Persistent role identities are expected of senior leaders on a 24/7 basis and are: steward of the profession, critical and reflective thinker, networked leader, and resilient leader. Mission-specific role identities are driven more by specific duties and requirements: strategic advisor and communicator, strategic theorist, strategic planner, and senior leader at the strategic level.

Fourth, recommendations are given for furthering the initiative across an SSC program using Bloom's affective domain to specify a progression of developmental objectives. These include establishing separate developmental objectives that are attainable through both formal education and the many available non-formal education opportunities that SSC environments provide. This allows for a way to provide a well-rounded development environment that goes beyond the classroom setting.

This Letort Paper concludes with further recommendations on how this curricular model could be generalized across both officer and civilian professional development programs.

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