



**Commission on Colleges  
Southern Association of Colleges and Schools**

**REPORT OF THE REAFFIRMATION COMMITTEE**

**Statement Regarding the Report**

*The Commission on Colleges is responsible for making the final determination on reaffirmation of accreditation based on the findings contained in this committee report, the institution's response to issues contained in the report, other assessments relevant to the review, and application of the Commission's policies and procedures. Final interpretation of the Principles of Accreditation and final action on the accreditation status of the institution rest with the Commission on Colleges.*

**Name of the Institution: Air University**

**Date of the Review: March 1-4, 2009**

**COC Staff Member: Rudolph S. Jackson**

**Chair of the Committee: Michael B. Colegrove  
Vice President for Student Services  
University of the Cumberlands  
Williamsburg, Kentucky**

## Part III. Assessment of the Quality Enhancement Plan

### A. Brief description of the institution's Quality Enhancement Plan

Air University's Quality Enhancement Plan, "Cross-Culturally Competent Airmen," is intended to prepare professional military students to operate effectively in any cultural context. The Air Force has identified cross-cultural competence as an urgent requirement due to the increasing numbers of Airmen supporting global operations. Air University, in turn, has leveraged the QEP to address this need in an appropriate educational fashion and in keeping with its mission.

This plan is founded on a faculty-developed culture-general model of cross-cultural competence (3C) that defines the concept as: "The ability to quickly and accurately comprehend, then appropriately and effectively act in a culturally complex environment to achieve the desired effect – without necessarily having had prior exposure to a particular group, region or language" (p. 2). The QEP is very clear that this is a culture-general, not a culture specific or area studies model. The core premise is that students will be able to function more effectively in a given cultural context by being mindful of the critical dimensions of culture and having the capacity to "learn culture" rapidly.

The four elements required for 3C are:

- A body of culture-general knowledge. This provides the intellectual scaffolding necessary for students to learn about specific cultural contexts they encounter.
- Cross-cultural skills. Communicating, negotiating and relating effectively with culturally distinct individuals are essential to Airmen's success on operations.
- Positive attitudes. Openness to learning and acceptance of cultural differences provide the gateway to acquiring cultural knowledge and enacting cultural skills.
- Application. The ability and opportunities to apply culture-general knowledge and skills in particular cultural contexts.

The QEP's four student learning outcomes are explicitly derived from the model's components.

Air University's QEP is designed to reach as many students as possible, early in their careers. The Plan will also take advantage of the Air Force approach to career-long learning, since all members of the institution attend Air University at multiple points in their career. The QEP will be implemented across the curriculum – in both undergraduate and graduate education programs – and employ distance learning modalities to maximize learning opportunities for all students. Given the size of Air University and complexity of developing cross-cultural competence, the QEP's curricular interventions will be implemented in three phases:

First, three educational efforts currently under development will address the cross-cultural learning needs of junior enlisted Airmen, future officers and junior officers starting in Academic Year 2009-2010, expanding in Academic Year 2010-2011 and continuing for the duration of the QEP. These programs are: the Community College of the Air Force, Officer Training School and Squadron Officer College.

Second, three existing senior educational programs – one for enlisted Airmen and two for officers – with varying degrees of cross-cultural learning will be systematically reviewed and revised to enhance student learning on relevant topics. The programs are: the Senior Noncommissioned Officer Academy, Air Command & Staff College and the Air War College. Curricular changes in these academic units will be piloted as they are developed, rolled-out by Academic Year 2011-2012 and fully implemented by Academic Year 2012-2013.

Third, by Academic Year 2013-2014, all six programs will be fully operational and assessed. Air University's QEP will assess student learning outcomes using both qualitative and quantitative methods before, during, and after their participation in relevant courses; the exact nature of the assessments will vary according to the course. The Intercultural Development Inventory will be used as a baseline measure for airmen in all six academic units as well as a pre-post test measure of 3C in specific courses. These results will permit constant improvement to curriculum and instruction. Finally, the QEP will strengthen educational support by hiring additional specialized faculty members, enhancing professional development programs for faculty/staff and acquiring additional learning resources. Together with sufficient financial resources and strong institutional leadership, these measures will significantly enhance the environment that supports Air University students' development of cross-cultural competence.

Responsibility for the implementation of the QEP will rest with the QEP Coordinator and a leadership team that will include the Culture and Language Center Director, the Culture Chair, the Assessment Chair, QEP Coordinators of the academic units, and four specialized faculty (Cross-Cultural Communication Chair, Cross-Cultural Relations Chair, Negotiations Director, and Negotiations Deputy Director) from the new Department of Cross-Cultural Competence.

## **B. Analysis of the Acceptability of the Quality Enhancement Plan**

1. **Broad-based Process.** *The institution uses a broad-based institutional process for identifying key issues emerging from institutional assessment.*

The QEP is closely related to Air University's mission, which is to "provide dynamic, comprehensive education to prepare graduates to develop, employ, command, research and champion air, space and cyberspace power at all levels" (p. 4). The curriculum of AU is described by the *Continuum of Officer and Enlisted Professional Military Education Strategic Guidance* document and includes "Global, Regional and Cultural Awareness" as one of 24 sub competencies. The faculty committee that revised the Continuum in 2008 concluded that cross-cultural competence actually "washes across the entire curriculum" (p. 5), hence is integral to all eight major competencies. The committee report states that, "culture is woven into the very essence of the Air Force, as well as its core business" (p. 5).

The realization of educational Goal 3 of AU's Strategic Plan, to "Develop cross-culturally competent Airmen of all ranks," is given strong support by the QEP in four ways: (1) the conceptual model of cross-cultural competence, (2) curriculum, faculty, and resource development/acquisition, (3) distance learning coursework, and (4) the cultural dimension of pre-deployment preparation (p. 6).

2. **Focus of the Plan.** *The institution identifies a significant issue that (1) focuses on learning outcomes and/or the environment supporting student learning and (2) accomplishes the mission of the institution.*

The QEP has a clear focus, cross-cultural competence (3C) that relates directly to the Air Force goal of ensuring, "that graduates are better able to perform their responsibilities in culturally-complex environments." All of the activities presented in the QEP are directly related to that goal. Since Air University

graduates a wide array of students, a broad-based approach is needed to educate both enlisted and officer personnel in order to have an impact on operational forces. This QEP accomplishes this task through an integrated, multi-faceted program.

The topic of “Cross-Culturally Competent Airmen” addresses a key area for Air University, the Air Force, and the Department of Defense. Increasingly, men and women of the Armed Forces are asked to operate in complex environments, both nationally and globally, performing less traditional roles than ever before. An understanding of culture is often essential to mission accomplishment. The importance of developing cultural awareness skills was clearly documented by the 2004 Defense Science Board Summer, the 2005 Defense Language Transformation Roadmap, and other Defense Department studies.

Three phases are proposed to execute the plan from 2009 to 2014. Phase I (AY2010 & AY2011) will address the Community College of the Air Force (Junior Officers), Officer Training School (Future Officers), and Squadron Officer College (Junior Officers). Phase II (AY2012 & AY2013) will cover more senior students in the Senior NCO Academy (Senior Enlisted), Air Command and Staff College (Intermediate Officers), and Air War College (Senior Officers). Phase III (AY2014) will include comprehensive assessment and reporting. However, Phase II schools will not lie dormant until 2012 as efforts are already underway by the faculty to integrate culture general topics into the curricula. The formal phase will allow a thorough vetting and assessment of those schools. Similarly, Phase I efforts will not stop at 2012, but will actually allow a thorough vetting and assessment of those schools. Similarly, Phase I efforts will not stop at 2012, but the schools will continue to refine the programs and assessment.

The QEP clearly identifies four areas of student learning outcomes:

1. Foundational knowledge of culture-general ideas and principles
2. Skills necessary to work effectively in cross-cultural contexts
3. Positive attitudes toward cultural differences that predispose learners to effective learning and action
4. The ability to apply culture-general learning effectively in specific contexts

3. **Institutional Capability for the Initiation and Continuation of the Plan.** *The institution provides evidence that it has sufficient resources to initiate, implement, sustain, and complete the QEP.*

Clearly, Air University has the capability to initiate and continue the QEP. It has established a timeline in which the three phases of the plan will be implemented. Additionally, the institution has identified a qualified individual to administer and oversee the implementation. A new department within the Culture and Language Center (CLC), the Department of Cross-Cultural Competence, will have primary responsibility for the implementation and continuation of the plan and will provide consultant services to the college and schools. This department, chaired by the QEP director, includes the culture chair, the Culture and Language Center Director, and three new positions – cross-cultural communication chair, cross-

cultural relations chair, and assessment chair. Also, the negotiations director and the negotiations deputy director—both members of the CLC, QEP coordinators in the academic units, and an outside expert in cross-cultural learning and assessment will participate in program implementation, development, and evaluation. These individuals have appropriate degrees and experience to administer the plan.

Resources, including financial and physical resources, and academic resources and systems are sufficient to implement and sustain the outcomes of the plan. \$8.75 million dollars have been allocated to the QEP over a five-year period, to include funding for administration and overhead, curriculum development, faculty and staff development, learning resources, research and assessment, specialized faculty, and technology, with approximately \$6 million for specialized faculty and curriculum development. Air University has administrative processes for monitoring the progress of its quality improvement plan, including curriculum development and review process, faculty development and evaluation processes, budgetary oversight processes and assessment processes. Finally, the institution, through ownership or formal arrangements and agreements, provides and supports student and faculty with library collections and services as well as access to other learning/information resources consistent with the degrees offered. AU's library collections, resources and services are sufficient to support the educational and research dimensions of the QEP.

4. ***Broad-based Involvement of the Community.*** *The institution demonstrates that all aspects of its community were involved in the development and proposed implementation of the Plan.*

This QEP has emerged out a broad-based consultative process. In 2006, the Chief of Staff of the Air Force (CSAF) reinforced the Defense Department initiatives by promulgating his Initiatives on Culture and Language, and by highlighting the need to integrate culture and language throughout Air Force Professional Military Education (PME). Subsequently, Air University established the Culture and Language Center to coordinate across the AF and to help infuse culture and language in PME curricula. The Air University QEP capitalizes on the initial efforts of the Defense Department and lays the foundation for development across the Air Force. This was a case of a critical need in search of a QEP.

The development of AU's Quality Enhancement Plan was a broad based, well structured process that involved many key constituencies over a two year period. Students, faculty, academic leaders (Council of Deans), and the Board of Visitors were all consulted during this time. The capstone of the QEP identification was the call for proposals by the Chief Academic Officer to the academic deans in March 2007, who in turn passed the information to the faculty of their units. Three proposals were deemed meritorious in terms of meeting SACS criteria as well as a critical need of the Air Force and the Department of Defense. The Council of Deans evaluated each of three and settled on the cross-cultural competence QEP as representing the best fit with these criteria. The Council's recommendation was passed on to the school commandants, school commanders, and faculty representatives, who voted for approval of the

proposed QEP. The recommendation was accepted by the Commander of Air University and endorsed by the Board of Visitors. This consultative process concluded in May, 2007. In identifying the topic, Air University also utilized the results of over 250 student surveys and dozens of focus group discussions conducted by RAND in 2006-2007. The selection clearly supports the Chief of Staff of the Air Force's initiative of improving the overall culture and language skills of all Airmen.

The Air University QEP provides a comprehensive approach as it addresses both officer and enlisted education. Additionally, the selection of six different levels of PME ensures that all personnel, junior through senior, receive the benefits of this educational initiative. By selecting programs that are progressive and of sufficient length, Air University has ensured that cultural awareness will be reinforced throughout the career of an Airman.

5. **Assessment of the Plan.** *The institution demonstrates that it has goals and a plan to access their achievement.*

QEP includes a phased and multifaceted approach to assessment which will focus first on junior students in the Community College of the Air Force, Officer Training School, and Squadron Officer College in Phase I and senior students in Senior NCO Academy, Air Command & Staff College, and Air War College during phase 2. Assessment of QEP learning outcomes is multifaceted, consisting of: (1) the Intercultural Development Inventory, an external measure of cross-cultural competence; (2) examinations that utilize multiple choice questions to test for content knowledge; (3) scenarios and simulations that test for the ability of students to apply knowledge to specific cultural contexts, (4) post-course surveys of students to ascertain their perspectives on the value of the cross-cultural competence education, and (5) post-course evaluations by the graduates' supervisors regarding their cross-cultural cultural skills in the actual cultural contexts where they are serving.

While the QEP provides a description of the types of assessment being envisioned for each phase and in relationship to different curricular interventions, it does not provide a detailed overview of assessment during the five-year period. A detailed five-year assessment chart would serve as an assessment map or guide for the process, would identify assessments to be administered and when, would show how specific assessments are tied to the four student learning outcomes in the QEP. The chart would capture in one place the essentials of the assessment plan (e.g., timeline, assessment types, benchmarks/expected results), provide for easy monitoring of the plan by those responsible for its implementation, remind the implementation team of upcoming assessments, and facilitate the collection of assessment data.

Recommendation #1: The Committee, therefore, recommends that Air University develop a detailed, five-year assessment chart for the QEP.

### **C. Analysis and Comments for Strengthening the QEP**

Air University's cross-cultural competence (3C) QEP is a pioneering effort to broadly and deeply infuse culture general education into the education of Airmen. Its central purpose is to support

the global mission of the Air Force by preparing students to work effectively in culturally complex environments. The emphasis on culture general knowledge, skills, attitudes is state of the art and takes into account the fact that Airmen are deployed to many different countries and cultural contexts. By understanding culture, their capacity to learn and adapt more quickly to new circumstances will be enhanced. By combining QEP culture general education with pre-deployment and on site culture specific education, the Air Force will have a powerful set of tools to enhance the performance of Airmen in carrying out their responsibilities. We know of no other U.S. higher education institution, military or otherwise, that has embarked on a plan of this magnitude and we commend Air University for its visionary QEP.

For a QEP to be successful, the central purpose needs to be compelling and a fit with institutional mission. We believe that this QEP has achieved that very well. The ideas embedded in this QEP have deep resonance within the Air Force and, indeed, are a response to a widespread internal call for this kind of learning. Secondly, a successful QEP requires financial and human resources. This QEP is very strong in both of those areas. A team of content experts is already in place and more specialists are being sought. An outstanding external expert has been selected who will work with AU. The budget is consistent with the scope of the program and will enable the various activities to be accomplished, in our view. Third, an infrastructure needs to be in place to support the QEP; in that respect, Air University is very strong by having an existing Culture and Language Center, an emerging Department of Cross-Cultural Competence, and a deliberative body, the Culture Council. Fourth, assessment is critical; formative and summative monitoring and evaluation need to be in place. We feel that this QEP is strong on assessment; there will be an Assessment Chair and the assessment model uses multiple methods, both quantitative and qualitative, and multiple measures: instruments, surveys, examinations, scenarios, and simulations. Finally, the QEP needs to be feasible. The scope of this QEP is broad, touching as it does on six academic units of Air University. However, the plan is sequenced into two phases with each having specific targets. The QEP, while ambitious, is not trying to do too much at any one point.

The cautionary note from this committee is that the QEP is complex and still has many things going on at any given point in time. In order to keep track of activities, we have recommended the development of a clear flow chart for assessment that will keep the various pieces of the program in place. We are concerned that absent such a chart, it would be easy to lose sight of a particular assessment need or requirement.

In conclusion, Air University's QEP has the potential to be truly transformative. Further, this QEP can potentially serve as a model for cross-cultural competence development beyond AU. We again applaud Air University for its visionary QEP and wish it well in this important endeavor.

## APPENDIX A

### Roster of the On-Site Review Committee

Dr. Michael B. Colegrove - **CHAIR**  
Vice President for Student Services  
University of the Cumberlands  
7197 College Station Drive  
Williamsburg, KY 40769  
(606) 539-4230; Fax: (606) 539-4136  
[mcole@ucumberlands.edu](mailto:mcole@ucumberlands.edu)

Dr. Anthony Brown  
Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs  
Elizabeth City State University  
1704 Weeksville Road  
Campus Box 773  
Elizabeth City, NC 27909  
(252) 335-3279; Fax: (252) 335-3502  
[abrown@mail.ecsu.edu](mailto:abrown@mail.ecsu.edu)

Dean Frieda P. Davison  
Dean of the Library  
University of South Carolina -Upstate  
800 University Way  
Spartanburg, SC 29303  
(864) 503-5610; Fax: (864) 503-5601  
[fdavison@uscupstate.edu](mailto:fdavison@uscupstate.edu)

Dr. John P. Johnson  
President  
Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University  
600 S. Clyde Morris Boulevard  
Daytona Beach, FL 32114-3900  
(386) 226-6202 Fax: (386) 226-7017  
[john.johnson@erau.edu](mailto:john.johnson@erau.edu)

Dr. Andre Michelle Lubecke  
Professor of Mathematics  
Lander University  
Room 321 Laura Lander Hall  
Greenwood, SC 29649  
(864) 388-8297 Fax: (864) 388-8126  
[alubecke@lander.edu](mailto:alubecke@lander.edu)

Dr. Shirley F. Manigault  
Assoc. Dean, CAS  
Professor of English  
Winston-Salem State University  
601 Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive  
130 Carolina Hall  
Winston-Salem, NC 27110  
(336) 750-2183; Fax: (336) 750-2405  
[manigaults@wssu.edu](mailto:manigaults@wssu.edu)

Dr. Isaac S. Metts  
Dean of Planning and Assessment  
The Citadel  
Citadel Station  
Charleston, SC 29409  
(843) 953-5155; Fax: (843) 953-5896  
[mettss@citadel.edu](mailto:mettss@citadel.edu)

Dr. Charlene Wages  
Vice President for Administration  
and Professor of Psychology  
Francis Marion University  
P. O. Box 100547  
Florence, SC 29501-0547  
(843) 661-1146; Fax: (843) 661-1202  
[CWages@FMarion.edu](mailto:CWages@FMarion.edu)

Dr. Jerre W. Wilson  
Vice President, Academic Affairs  
Marine Corps University  
2076 South Street  
Quantico, VA 22134  
(703) 784-6917; Fax: (703) 784-2793  
[jerre.wilson@usmc.mil](mailto:jerre.wilson@usmc.mil)

#### **QEP**

Dr. R. Paige  
Professor of International and Intercultural  
Education  
University of Minnesota, Twin Cities  
330 Wulling Hall, 86 Pleasant Street SE  
Minneapolis, MN 55112  
(612) 626-7456; Fax: (612) 624-3377  
[r-paig@umn.edu](mailto:r-paig@umn.edu)



## **APPENDIX B**

### **List of Recommendations Cited in the Report of the Reaffirmation Committee**

Recommendation #1: The Committee, therefore, recommends that Air University develop a detailed, five-year assessment chart for the QEP.