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Air Force Language, Region and Culture Program Office

10/18/2010 - **WASHINGTON (AFNS)** -- The Air Force Language and Culture Center added 260 participants from more than 400 active-duty officer and cadet applicants to the Language Enabled Airman Program during its selection board in September, officials said here Oct. 15.

The Air Force program has grown since its first board, when 192 U.S. Air Force Academy and ROTC cadets were selected to be among the first LEAP participants, officials added.

"The program continues to see quality applicants interested in the career-long opportunity, as witnessed in the number of top (Academy) and ROTC graduate applications we reviewed," said Lt. Col. Paul Valenzuela, the chief of the Language, Region and Culture Program Office.

He explained that a long view LRC approach will better prepare Airmen to overcome LRC barriers.

"Our research has shown that 'just-in-time' methods do little to affect our strategic ability to respond to the dynamic nature of Air Force language, region and culture and building partnership capability challenges," said Lt. Col. Brian Smith, the AFCLC language department deputy director. "We hope to change that shortcoming with LEAP, by not only harvesting talent gained through existing language training pipelines, but by placing LEAP participants into a career-long, deliberate development pipeline, enabling us to respond to current and emerging Air Force LRC requirements."

In today's global environment, the ability to communicate, negotiate, relate and establish credibility is critical to building partnerships and growing LRC capabilities, the colonel added.

According to the 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review, "Operating in partnership with host-nation security forces and among local populations puts a premium on foreign language skills and regional and cultural knowledge."

In accordance with the QDR, Air Force officials continue to enhance LRC capability through building partnerships and preparing Airmen with the skill sets to understand regional nuances that may be the difference between operational success and failure.

"If a speaker opens with a greeting in the wrong dialect, he or she may be inadvertently perceived to be an enemy," said Jer Donald Get, an Air Force Senior Language Authority.

The ability to differentiate between dialects gives an Airman credibility across regional borders, he said.

"We live in a global society, and it's important to communicate in the language of the host," said former Pennsylvania Secretary of State Pedro A. Cortes, at a recent Spanish language education and resource network conference. "It's beyond understanding. It's about showing respect and connecting with people."

Milestones such as the Culture, Region and Language Flight Plan, the establishment of the Air Force Culture and Language Center, LEAP, the updated Foreign Language Proficiency Bonus, the ROTC Foreign Language Skill Proficiency Bonus and foreign language proficiency recognition through promotion boards and award programs represent a number of ongoing initiatives associated with the enhancement of LRC capability.

"In addition to core adviser and expeditionary skills, LRC skills are crucial to enabling Airmen to assess, train, advise and assist partner nations in the development of their aviation resources, to meet national needs in support of U.S. interests," said Ken Arteaga, the Air Education Training Command special missions division deputy chief.

LRC capability is a large contributor to winning today's fight, and it is through the Air Force's dedication to the enhancement of LRC that our Airmen are equipped with the necessary skills to succeed, he added.

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