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Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute
CENTER OF EXCELLENCE



DEOMI Cadet Internship: Growing Future Leaders Now

Story by DEOMI Public Affairs

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PATRICK SPACE FORCE BASE, Fla.— The Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute achieved a significant milestone with the arrival of three U.S. Air Force Academy and two U.S. Military Academy West Point cadets May 22 to participate in DEOMI’s first official Summer Research Program.

The Summer Research Program originated more than a decade ago as an unofficial internship opportunity for West Point cadets. Since then, DEOMI held the internship several times, producing mutually beneficial results for all parties involved. The arrival of these cadets marks the first of a five-year official agreement with both West Point and the Air Force Academy to provide a research internship for cadets in the social sciences.

“DEOMI’s recent transition to a Center of Excellence provided the institute with an opportunity to affiliate with other centers of excellence ... and establish long-term relationships with them on several fronts,” said Dr. Daniel McDonald, director of the Hope Research Center at DEOMI. “One being to mutually pursue the education of the cadets,” he added.

According to McDonald, other mutually beneficial opportunities may include that the academies “could advise us on institutional matters as we evolve into the center of excellence” and “we could collaborate on research of key topics that we are both interested in, such as hazing, bullying, discrimination, and diversity and inclusion.”

“Our partnerships are important to us ... because it really does require a team of folks to get after the behaviors that we are trying to mitigate,” said Monica Daniel, deputy director for the Center of Excellence at DEOMI.

“We are growing future leaders. ... Not one institute can do it all,” she added. “We have to draw on each other if we are really going to get after it and make the change we’re trying to make.”



Over the last few weeks, the cadets worked in collaboration with DEOMI’s applied sciences and analytics research team to analyze data and produced research reports on various topics, such as fostering a culture of excellence and the impacts of hazing. Their work culminated with a presentation to demonstrate what they have learned.

West Point Cadet Jade McBride gave a presentation on fostering a culture of excellence through coaching, engaged teams, and strategic communication. Her research concluded that it would not be possible to create a center of excellence without having a culture dedicated to engaging teams through strategic communication and coaching.

Like McBride, West Point Cadet Jennise Zapata focused on DEOMI’s culture of excellence principles and how she could incorporate them into the Latina Connection, a club for Latina cadets at West Point. Her research showed that having a clearly communicated and understood vision, clear purpose and meaning, high performers, resiliency to change, and collaborative and engaging teams provided the best opportunities to unite, strengthen and empower Latina cadets and staff at West Point. While she was unable to attend, she recorded her findings in a video that played during the presentation.



Air Force Academy Cadets Blake Balsler, Madyson Ohren, and Megana Ramya gave a group presentation on the impacts hazing and demeaning behaviors have on cohesion within their academy. They examined several factors that indicated an increase in demeaning behavior and hazing significantly predicted a decrease in cohesion. One of the results they found from their research was that “decades of previous ideologies and traditions incorporated into the U.S. Air Force Academy lifestyle may be detrimental to the very phenomenon (cohesion) they are trying to create.”

“That mentality of ‘it happened to me, and it was not that bad,’ or that ‘it’s normal,’ did not apply to us,” said Balsler, referring to the entire student body of his class at the Air Force Academy.

Balsler, Ohren, and Ramya joined the Air Force Academy in 2020, a time when the academy was adjusting to new safety regulations brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. They realized that they were in a unique position to objectively analyze hazing and demeaning behaviors within their academy because their class’s experiences differed drastically from traditional experiences had by previous classes.

Each in their own way, the Air Force cadets had strong feelings about the importance of their research and the impact it may have in helping future cadets have the best possible experience.

Following the presentation, McDonald said he was impressed with not only the cadets’ work and their awareness of the immediate real-world applications their work may have, but also their mindset toward the education DEOMI provided them. The cadets understood the value of the education and were not just going to store what they learned here in the back of their minds until they become leaders. “They’re doing it now. ... That is what is really impressive,” he added.

Building on the previous decade’s success, DEOMI plans to continue providing research opportunities for cadets in the social sciences through the Summer Research Program; while also cultivating long-lasting, collaborative, and mutually beneficial bonds with the nation’s top military academies.

The DEOMI team is an inclusive force that values and develops all individuals and thrives on their contributions. Since its inception in 1971, then known as the Defense Race Relations Institute, DEOMI has developed and delivered innovative education, training, research, and collaborative solutions to more than 52,000 DEOMI military and civilian graduates.

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