



DEOMI

Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute
'READINESS... Is Our Guiding Principle'



DEOMI Graduation Marks Significant Milestone Achievement

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PATRICK SPACE FORCE BASE, Fla. — On Nov. 22, the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute successfully graduated 44 Equal Opportunity Advisor Course students. The course, which began Oct. 3, marked a significant milestone achievement for the institute, being the first in-person EOAC held since the COVID-19 pandemic forced DEOMI to close its doors to in-resident students in March 2020.

At the graduation ceremony, DEOMI Commandant Navy Capt. Delmy Robinson beamed with pride as she congratulated the graduates. “I am confident that these students will be phenomenal force multipliers to the total force — bringing together individuals from nearly every corner of the Earth in service of one overarching vision: an inclusive force that values and develops all individuals and thrives on their contributions,” she said.

“Make no mistake, diversity is a hallmark of the modern armed forces,” declared guest speaker Army Col. Trina Rice, who currently serves as the senior military assistant to the undersecretary of defense for personnel and readiness. She discussed the importance of ensuring people receive fair treatment, saying that “equal opportunity means mission readiness.”

“For me, this was a powerful course,” remarked Army Lt. Col. Leah M. Kenfield upon receiving the Commandant’s Award. “I learned a great deal about myself,” she said. She encouraged her fellow graduates, saying that it was now time for them to go out and create better command climates.

Before pandemic-related policies took effect, DEOMI had an EOAC in progress with students scheduled to graduate on March 27, 2020. With restrictions on travel and in-person gathering imminent, DEOMI’s faculty and staff had to act quickly to condense the final portion of the course and ensure that the students could receive their certificates and return to their duty locations as qualified equal opportunity advisors and command climate specialists. DEOMI’s team of dedicated professionals rose to the occasion and overcame unprecedented obstacles to complete this vital task.

However, COVID-19 did much more than force DEOMI to modify one course and cancel one graduation. It identified a critical vulnerability in the institute’s ability to accomplish its mission. With the pandemic preventing in-person instruction, DEOMI leaders pulled in decades worth of knowledge and experience to come up with a solution — develop a virtual environment.

Before the pandemic, DEOMI had offered some other courses in a hybrid format, combining in-person instruction with online lessons delivered via a learning management system, but the EOAC had only ever occurred on site in a classroom setting.

“The main challenge in planning design was ensuring that the learning objectives could be achieved while using a virtual platform,” explained Supervisory Instructional Systems Specialist Adrian Cheung.

To accomplish the transition to a virtual environment, curriculum developers produced 23 online modules covering the EOAC’s subject matter. This became the first phase of the Equal Opportunity Advisor Virtual Course. The second phase of the EOAVC required students to apply the knowledge they gained in Phase 1 in small-group settings using Microsoft Teams and Zoom platforms. These platforms enabled students to virtually engage with each other and DEOMI faculty. The first EOAVC began on July 20, 2020. Since then, DEOMI successfully conducted 10 EOAVCs.

To prepare for the return to in-person instruction, the institute developed the Faculty Transition Training Course, which equipped instructors and facilitators to conduct face-to-face classes in the DEOMI facility. This included information on curriculum, learning technology, classroom management, student management, and support services. It even incorporated role-playing.

“It is important that each instructor/facilitator is prepared to handle each situation that may develop in the small-group environment,” said Training Specialist Karen Fidgeon. “Some of the role-players deserve an Oscar for their performance,” she quipped.

“After two years of being virtual, all of the small-group rooms had to be standardized and the instructors had to make sure all of the materials were up to date and available to be able to have a successful class,” Space Force Senior Chief Petty



Officer Cory Gunkel explained. “It was important to conduct this training with the instructors to make sure that all of them were on the same page when they delivered the curriculum to the students.”

Air Force Master Sgt. Sidney W. McSwain, who has been an instructor at DEOMI since November 2021, described the transition from virtual to in-person instruction as “a welcome challenge.” He noted that in-person training involves many elements, including “heightened degrees of nonverbal communication, increased inter- and intra-group dynamics, and staying abreast to both mental and emotional domains of each student.”



“These changes create a healthy degree of stress that challenges both the instructor pool and our in-resident students that the virtual environment simply can’t replicate,” McSwain clarified.

For the students, the opportunity to attend the EOAC in person created a sense of camaraderie. Army Sgt. 1st Class Cathrine Joy Schmid, who is an intelligence and security non-commissioned officer in charge stationed at Joint Base Lewis-McChord in Washington, said that she and her classmates went out to dinner every Friday night, in addition to having lunch together in the dining facility every day. She developed strong friendships and said that she trusts her classmates and will be able to reach out to any of them for support in the future.

Schmid, who has been in the Army for almost 18 years, described the EOAC as the most significant emotional event she’s experienced in her career since basic training. “I expected to come here and learn how to fill out forms and do the intakes, which of course we all did, but there was that other side of it — that learning how humans work — that was probably the most significant,” Schmid said.



“I want to take care of soldiers,” Schmid explained when discussing her reason for entering the equal opportunity career field. She got the impression that her classmates and instructors were also all at DEOMI because they wanted to be. “The fact that everybody who’s here doesn’t have ulterior motives for it... felt really good,” she said.

“I am attending DEOMI’s EOAC because I have always believed that every person should be treated with dignity and respect and allowed to work in an environment where their creativity and uniqueness can be cultivated and shared with others around them,” explained Navy Petty Officer 1st Class David Olvera, a command climate specialist aboard the USS Nimitz at Bremerton, Washington.

“The most beneficial part of this course has been the engagement between the instructors and students,” Olvera said. “I have learned so much while being afforded the opportunity to receive training from subject-matter experts in the field and engaging in challenging and thought-provoking discussions with my peers.”

Equal Employment Opportunity Specialist Edmund Burke, who is a civilian at Joint Base Anacostia-Bolling in Washington, D.C., enrolled in the EOAC so that he can help his colleagues handle military equal opportunity complaints. For Burke, the most beneficial part of the course was being able to practice counseling sessions and receiving feedback and rubrics. “I am grateful for the opportunity to be here learning from the experts,” he said.

“The group activities were most beneficial to me because it fit my learning style and allowed me to learn from my mistakes,” said Army Sgt. 1st Class Joshua Thibodeaux, a platoon sergeant stationed at Fort Drum, New York. “This course has improved my self-awareness and awareness of what is going on around me.

“EOAC 23-01 met all expectations as it returned to an in-resident program,” said DEOMI’s Military Equal Opportunity Active-Duty Program Manager Maj. Robert C. Fales. “It was a great opportunity to deliver the pilot course to a smaller class to allow dormant processes and procedures to be refreshed to support the return of students.”

Fales does not expect the institute to host the course virtually in the future, as he explained that “a significant portion of the process and growth students go through during EOAC cannot be replicated in the virtual environment.”

Though temporary, the institute’s ability to create a robust virtual environment for this course, and many other courses, is a testament to its mission — “Develop and deliver innovative education, training, research, and collaborative solutions to optimize total force readiness.”

As it always has, DEOMI will continue to evaluate all elements of the course and ensure continuous improvement in its training. The successful execution of this course, capped by the return of a formal graduation ceremony, is a testament to the unwavering commitment of the institute’s dedicated professionals to adapt and overcome any challenge.

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 approximately 52,000 DEOMI military and civilian graduates.

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