



DEOMI Board of Advisor's Reaffirm Commitment to Workforce Success, Focus on Mission Expansion

*Story by U.S. Army Sgt. 1st Class Lance Pounds, DEOMI Public Affairs
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PATRICK SPACE FORCE BASE, Fla.— The Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute (DEOMI) hosted its first in-person Board of Advisor (BOA) meeting since before the COVID-19 pandemic, on May 2, 2024. Deputy Director of the Defense Human Resources Activity (DHRA) Mr. Michael Sorrento, Director of the Office for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (ODEI) Dr. Lisa Arfaa, and DEOMI Commandant U.S. Air Force Col. Michelle Nash, led the BOA as tri-chair members.

The BOA, as outlined in DoDI 1350.02, is a forum for senior leaders to exchange information and collaborate on the adequacy of DEOMI staffing, resources, plans, and strategies influencing support of DoD requirements for diversity management, civilian Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) and Military Equal Opportunity (MEO) programs. In addition, the BOA provides senior leaders the opportunity to discuss recommendations for efficiencies, allocation of resources, and coordinates military department, service-specific, and total force requirements for education, training and research.

First-time DEOMI BOA chair member, Sorrento opened the meeting by acknowledging the hard work that has been done thus far by the various Department and Service experts in attendance and briefly addressing DHRA's recent restructure.

"All of you have been working in this space for a long time, and you are all experts in here, but this is a fast-moving train, and things are shifting," said Sorrento, referring to the recent dissolution of the Diversity Management Operations Center.

Sorrento called the BOA both "timely" because it brought key stakeholders together into one room to discuss current and future plans, and "committed" because each attendee has a role to play in achieving workforce success.



“DEOMI provides excellent support to the Services in training, education, research, and consultation and we have an opportunity to expand this across similar mission spaces,” said Sorrento. “We do believe, strongly, that there is a huge value proposition here,” he added.

“What we are after is the commitment,” Sorrento said to the BOA attendees. “So that we can improve the workforce pipeline... So that DEOMI can plan effectively and execute their mission... So you all can benefit from the services they provide as a center of excellence.”

Also a first-time DEOMI BOA chair member, Arfaa shared Sorrento’s sentiment towards workforce success.

“We as the leaders are here to ensure that our people are successful, so that our service members are successful,” said Arfaa.

Arfaa added that the partnership ODEI has with the DHRA and DEOMI was wonderful because, “there is nothing more important than ensuring that those who are willing to stand up for the dignity, respect, opportunities, and well-being for all, are properly trained and educated.”

She then asked attendees to consider what they could do to help DEOMI meet the needs of an increasingly challenging environment.

Like Sorrento and Arfaa, this was Nash’s first time as a DEOMI BOA chair member. Nash spoke about DEOMI’s transformation to a Center of Excellence (CoE) and the Institute’s expanding mission.

“Right now, DEOMI is in a transition. Our mission set is expanding. I am really excited to have you all in the room to help make sure that we are heading in the right direction,” said Nash. “I am grateful for your continued support for DEOMI, as we work together to get after really hard problems,” she added.



Nash gave a brief overview of DEOMI's history, which dates back 1971, when the institute was called the Defense Race Relations Institute. Since then, DEOMI has continuously helped to shape the attitudes, behaviors, and policies that foster environments of dignity, respect, and equal treatment in the military and beyond.

Nash continued with an overview of DEOMI's reputation as an institute of higher learning. Initially accredited in 1983 by the Council on Occupational Education, the American Council on Education recommends that each DEOMI course be worth college credit. DEOMI is scheduled to have this accreditation renewed later this month.

She then talked about how DEOMI's mission set as a CoE is expanding to include four distinct program domains—Leadership Cross-Cultural Competencies, MEO, EEO, and Prevention.



Deputy to the DEOMI Commandant and Executive Director of the CoE Dr. Daniel McDonald, elaborated on the genesis of DEOMI as a CoE using excerpts from various documents published by the DoD and Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, dated as far back as 2018.

“The intent behind transforming DEOMI into a CoE is to establish a dedicated hub for research, development, training, education, and consultation to prepare leaders at all levels of professional development on matters pertaining to dignity, respect, opportunity, teamwork, leadership, well-being, and cross-cultural awareness,” said McDonald.

“In the past year alone, DEOMI made great strides towards meeting the CoE intent,” said McDonald.

McDonald then discussed DEOMI's core functions, which now include: Standards, Certification and Accreditation; Learning Management; Science and Technology Applications; Training Needs, Competencies, and Evaluations; Outreach, Partnerships, and Consultations; and Communities of Practice and Field Support Products.

“We really hit the ground running!” McDonald said, referring to Sorrento's previous comment about DEOMI having a huge proposition value. “DEOMI's foundational attributes will have immediate value, such as an expert multi-disciplinary team, established instructional systems, ready access to military and civilian subject matter experts, and so much more,” he added.

“The integrated multi-disciplinary expertise approach, which DEOMI uses to deliver excellence across the DoD, is powerful because it leverages the collective expertise of all our departments,” said McDonald, reemphasizing the propositional value of one attribute.

Following McDonald were several presentations, given by DEOMI's Directors and Department Heads, that provided BOA attendees with a detailed overview of each department within the Institute.

Representatives of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, and National Guard rounded out the BOA meeting with their responses to four focus areas DEOMI provided prior to the BOA. Those areas of focus were: identifying current gaps in the service DEOMI currently provides; identifying training, education, or research needs outside of EO/EEO that DEOMI could support; identifying potential emerging Service-specific requirements that could impact DEOMI; and recommendations for DEOMI's evolution as a CoE.



After the BOA, Arfaa said she viewed DEOMI as a “crucial partner” and “bridge” between Offices of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) and the Services.

“DEOMI is ‘the place’ where we all can congregate to learn and improve our civilian and military Service members from the professionals who go through DEOMI’s programs,” Arfaa added.

Sorrento reaffirmed DHRA’s commitment by stating, “I know the mission...and we are going to try to make DEOMI as operationally effective as we can; while also leveraging the rest of DHRA to do it!”

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 53,000 DEOMI military and civilian graduates.

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