

SUMMARY OF STABILITY ENHANCEMENT FINDINGS

Converting portions of the Army's resident courses to DL clearly makes soldiers more available to their units and, in most cases we considered, to their families as well. The total increase in on-station man-years is between 2,700 and 2,800, or about 13 to 14 percent of the estimated 20,000 man-years devoted to the types of courses considered in this analysis. Man-years available for unit duties are of course less, on the order of about 900 working man-years, reflecting allowance for completing DL work at home station.

Our analysis points to retaining current patterns for officer career courses, with appropriate shortening of the residential advanced course phase as DL conversions make that possible. Potential PCS savings would be more than offset by increased TDY costs if these courses were shifted to a TDY mode, and the family impact of increased separations would be significant.

Courses that are already conducted in a TDY mode show significant potential for decreasing the time soldiers spend away from home and from unit duties, with modest but unambiguous savings potential as well.

We note again that our estimates are conservative. Also, there are additional courses with DL conversion potential not reflected in our estimates; including these courses would add both to our TDY savings estimates and to the estimates of additional available days. Finally, with regard to savings estimates, it should be noted that we did not attribute savings to the additional available duty days, since

we counted these days as being given back to the units from which the soldiers were absent. We believe this approach is consistent with current Army efforts to improve readiness by making more soldiers available to units.

CONCLUDING REMARKS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

We conclude with some observations on the viability of DL-supported training and education options and some reservations concerning implementation. First, as we have noted repeatedly throughout this report, TADLP has considerable potential to leverage technology in ways that are advantageous to the Army. In particular, we have demonstrated that DL can, by moving training to soldiers' home stations, reduce education-related separations from units and families, and that by and large this can be done at comparable (for PCS courses) or lower (for TDY courses) costs. We have also pointed out other important ways in which DL can help: making truly continuing education an achievable goal, featuring focused segments that can be tailored to individual or unit needs, providing introductory or refresher short courses for additional skills, supplementing staff and individual development programs at unit level, and the like.

But DL is not a panacea for the Army's many training challenges. Care must be exercised in selecting course segments to be taught using DL—much of the training the Army needs to conduct is simply not amenable to this technique. For those skills that can be imparted using DL, training planners must realistically assess the time needed to do this—and the Army must ensure that soldiers have this time made available to them. This probably means providing for dedicated (“fenced”) time and may require a training policy letter describing the requirement to make such provisions. Many officials we have talked to, in TRADOC, the field, the schools, and the Pentagon, have stressed that this will require something amounting to a culture change in the Army's units. In any event, course scheduling will remain an item of interest for students, training managers, and commanders; if anything, DL programs make close coordination and timely use of ATRRS even more important.

It will also be important for the Army to avoid premature confidence in any major savings estimates. In particular, we caution against planning on large PCS savings. DL will not reduce PCS moves unless

an independent decision is made to convert courses from PCS to TDY. Even in those cases where moves might be reduced, any savings will be largely or completely offset by increased TDY costs. Further, converting long courses to TDY mode will add more family separations. Finally, our overall estimates of eventual savings are based to a significant extent on DL conversions that have not taken place and will not occur until the Army has worked through its conversion schedule.

The Army will find it fruitful to continue detailed monitoring and study of the costs associated with TADLP and overall institutional training, including some of the factors used in our analysis, but also extending to school resources—instructors, support, training materials, courseware development and maintenance, and longer-term facilities and other capital costs. Our previous DL research supports the finding of TADLP’s economic analysis that these costs—even when considering only the portions of them associated with DL—are considerable. It will also be helpful to conduct a separate study to determine more specific categories of PCS costs. This will enable better analysis of policies that would affect only one segment or another of the Army’s people.

Consistent with our analysis and the reasoning above, we offer the following general recommendations:

- Develop DL pilot programs for the advanced course portions of one or more AC career courses; monitor costs, savings, training effectiveness, and other benefits.
- Emphasize developing courseware early on for TDY professional development courses that appear to have larger stability and savings payoffs. This means looking particularly at courses that have higher TDY costs, longer residence requirements, larger DL conversion factors, or a combination of these features.
- Engage in a continuing examination of DL’s effects on the overall costs, benefits, and effectiveness of institutional training programs.
- Look more broadly and more thoroughly at ways in which the Army can capitalize on emerging DL technology.

The Army's long-term plan for distance learning can capture the potential benefits we have discussed in this report. As is the case with any program of this nature, careful monitoring is required from the beginning to assess the degree to which planning assumptions are holding true and goals are being met. Our research should help both to illuminate the potential areas for success and to identify areas in which problems can occur.