We conclude that DL can contribute to strategies to reduce shortages and improve fill rates and can facilitate the Army’s efforts to expand on those strategies (e.g., widening the window for reclassification). DL is particularly suited to making the reclassification, cross-training/MOS consolidation, and acceleration of training options more attractive to soldiers and commanders and more cost-effective for the Army. In addition, the three DL-based strategies will be useful in filling personnel gaps at both SL1 and NCO levels, and they will reduce the associated per-soldier cost of reducing shortages. Finally, the strategies can reduce the inevitable cost of force structure imbalances in a dynamic system, and they can indirectly improve the effectiveness of SRBs in reducing shortages. While the benefits identified in this analysis do not generally translate into current budget savings, we conclude that DL will increase the effectiveness of the overall process of reducing MOS shortages and will allow significant cuts in the Army’s future cost of reducing personnel shortages.

However, realizing all these potential benefits requires careful implementing of the DL program. This means making earlier choices of courses for conversion during DL’s long implementation period and concentrating on those courses that are most amenable to DL and that will help most to reduce the shortage problem (i.e., those focused on shortage MOSs, consolidating MOSs, and training problem MOSs). Most important, it also means creating DL courses that are attractive to students, commanders, and the Army, with sufficient flexibility to easily integrate into varying soldier career paths. In this regard, the DL program should emphasize the maximum use of emerging learning technologies to help reduce learning time (and,
thus, shorten courses) and to allow significant portions of the training to be done at home station. In addition, the DL program should strive to avoid the past pitfalls in industry and academia by providing sufficient student support to ensure speedy completion without increased PERSTEMPO or course attrition, and to provide sufficient administrative support for scheduling, monitoring, and recording training results. Finally, DL needs to provide courses as modularized, “just-in-time” training to take full advantage of opportunities to reduce unnecessary training and to allow refresher training on demand.

The above list of specific DL characteristics for achieving the Army’s personnel readiness goals underscores the need for DCSPER, as well as the Army as a whole, to work closely with the training community to develop the kind of DL program that can maximize benefits in all parts of the Army. In particular, we recommend that the Army actively pursue the conversion of significant portions of some of its longest reclassification courses to DL. Since the longer courses tend to be the more technical ones, and since many technical skills are amenable to DL, there is considerable potential for DL to help make training in these skills easier to schedule, easier to complete, and more efficient. Through a carefully designed monitoring program, the Army’s personnel and training communities would be able to shed some additional light on the best ways to select material to be presented using DL, the best use of the various DL technologies to impart the required skills, and the best set of training support systems for ensuring that DL succeeds in the AC environment. Since many of these skills and skill groups are found in other services and in the private sector, continuing and sharing this work can provide benefits that go well beyond the Army.