

A close-up photograph of a man with a grey mustache, wearing a green and black camouflage military uniform. He is resting his chin on his hand and looking upwards and to the left with a thoughtful expression. A pair of glasses is tucked into his shirt. The background is blurred, showing what appears to be an office or classroom setting.

THE AIR FORCE OFFICER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM: WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?

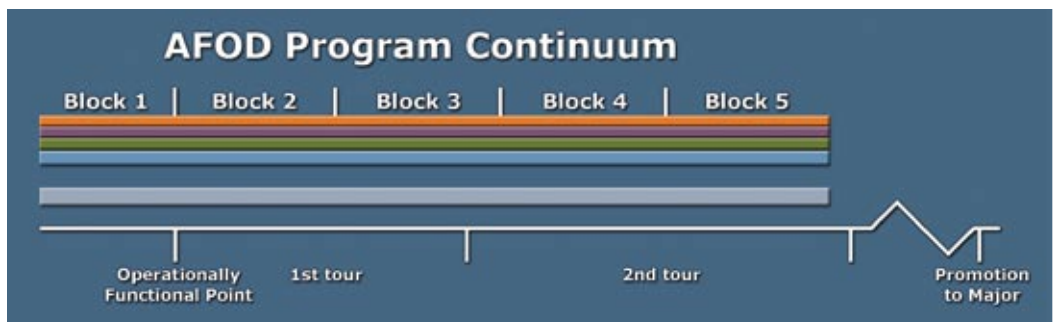
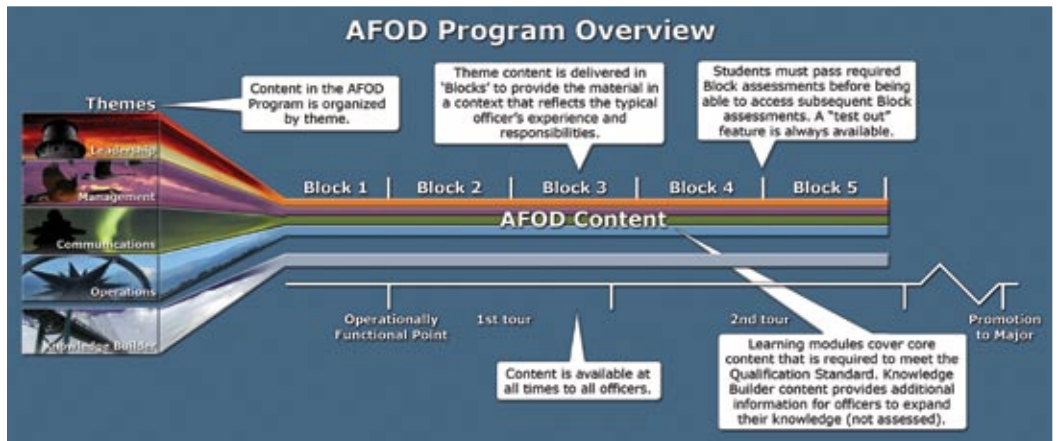
By Major Jamie Davidson and Major Rainer Wosnitza

A program aimed at delivering the professional development education for officers of Canada's Air Force is currently being developed.

The Air Force Officer Development (AFOD) Program replaces the former Air Force Officer Basic Course and Air Force Officer Advanced Course. Unlike its predecessors, AFOD uses the blended learning methods of distance education and traditional in-house residential training. This is a new direction for professional development education for Air Command. Although the program is designed to develop Air Force officers, students quickly note that flexibility underpins the curriculum's structure and application.

Although it may vary from one classification to another, the OFP occurs when a junior officer achieves occupational status during their first operational tour. Block 2, currently available, is optimally completed during the initial two years of an officer's first occupational posting. Block 3 and Block 4 material is tailored to meet the needs of officers approaching the end of their first tour and the beginning of their second tour. Block 5—the one and only residential component—is three-weeks in duration. Here, material learned through Blocks 1 to 4 is synthesized and applied during classroom instruction and practical exercises.

- All AFOD content is organized into one of four themes: leadership, management, communications or operations.



AFOD is organized into five blocks. Block 1 is administered between initial classification training and the point where a junior officer reaches the operationally functional point (OFP).

- Officers may access the program material at any time; however, only registered students will have access to assessment vehicles associated with the content.

- Based on the requirements of a typical junior officer, the block structure was developed to allow a student to progress through the content in a sequential manner. AFOD students, graduates or any other Canadian Forces (CF) member registered with an approved online distance-learning account has access to course content at any time. Learning expectations and any necessary student assessments are managed through the block structure.
- The “Test Out” option allows students possessing the requisite knowledge to progress quickly without having to complete a learning module. This feature recognizes that officers do acquire knowledge through other means and places emphasis on the knowledge, vice how the knowledge is obtained.
- Material stressed in each learning module is always the core information necessary to meet the expected standard. Additional in-depth content also forms part of each module.

AFOD material is developed based on a tailored approach to individual learning requirements. The ongoing learning process and linking professional military education to operational objectives underpins course content.

Tailored Approach

- Students are provided a recommended “Learning Path,” the preferred sequence to study course material.
- Material access is student-controlled.
- Control of scope: students are able to concentrate effort on any material they wish.
- Control of depth: students can access additional levels of detail, and thus exceed requirements.
- Canadian Forces School of Aerospace Studies (CFSAS) enforces the standard and monitors progress to ensure minimum expectations are met.

Ongoing Learning Process

- The program consists of ongoing part-time study, spanning years rather than being a discrete training event or course.
- AFOD reinforces the CF Officer Professional Military Education (OPME) Program content, rather than duplicating it.
- Content is accessible at times best suited to meet job requirements.
- Content is delivered in smaller amounts with greater frequency to assist in material retention and personal interest.

Linking of Professional Military Education to Operational Objectives

- Learning material is provided in context of operational activities, ensuring relevance.
- The program is designed from a “systems” perspective, emphasizing how material is interrelated. Linking AFOD content to the functions, roles and capabilities of the system allows the student to operate within the system more effectively.

Although AFOD is divided into blocks, core content spans the entire program. For example, leadership material—core content common to each block—increases in scope and depth as a student advances through the blocks. The same process exists in the three other core AFOD themes: management, operations and communications. The block structure of the program allows the organization of content within time, and themes allow the organization of the content within topics.

Student Feedback – AFOD Block 2

Readers may be aware that Block 2 is already well underway. To date, 427 students have enrolled, with 144 graduates. Captain Jodi Jane holds the distinction of being the one-hundredth graduate. Captain Jane completed all requirements on 13 August 2008. She did so while serving as a deployed CC130 navigator to Camp Mirage and Kandahar airfield.

Block 2 serials start every two months with 50 students per serial. Student feedback, such as the following, reflects the quality of the program:

I am pretty impressed with the courseware so far. As an instructor, I am very pleased to see how interesting and well developed this package is.... I find it so interesting that my wife and kids have to tell me to take breaks.

AFOD students want to be challenged and are not motivated through material requiring rote learning. In addition to the effort we put into our course material, we spend considerable time and effort developing the “Quizzes and Challenges.” Here is one example of a student’s perspective of the testing material:

It is about time the pass marks for military courses were raised, the time limits not so generous and the question answers not verbatim quotes from the study material.

The AFOD Program has been seen to be a model of what language-of-choice training programs should entail. All serials are fully bilingual. AFOD allows students to toggle between English and French at any time, there is no need to enrol in a French serial or an English serial. A comment received from a student stated:

I have to say that the modules are actually very well translated. Actually, it is the best translation I have seen in a CF document. Everything makes sense and the wording is accurate.

CFSAS courseware developers appreciate that most AFOD students are familiar with distance learning (DL). CFSAS is committed to presenting the highest quality DL experience possible and was pleased to receive one student’s feedback worded as follows:

...likely the best example of e-learning that we have in the forces to date.

Our Multi-Media Lab

Managed and supervised by experienced Air Force officers, the AFOD multi-media lab is staffed by several enrollees of the Federal Student Work Experience Program. Their graphic-designing skills and technological savvy create curriculum features that truly enhance the AFOD learning experience. As all current AFOD material is offered exclusively online, CFSAS relies on the technical expertise, creativity and artistic panache of these talented students.

AFOD Block 3

End October 2008 was the launch date for Block 3. This block provides greater depth to the theme material presented earlier in the program. Block 3 is more engaging visually and more technically sophisticated than Block 2. An introductory video explains that, in addition to continuing presentation of the material in themes, Block 3 courseware is divided into a learning path of three broad perspectives: the Environmental Perspective, the Systems Perspective and the Team Perspective. This division was chosen because Canada’s Air Force does not usually operate in isolation, but rather as one element of a broader effort. A second Block 3 improvement is the use of video hosts to guide students through the learning path and courseware. Block 3 hosts explain what to expect and emphasize key material in each module.

The Environmental Perspective presents a brief outline of how our comrades in the land and sea elements operate. This perspective begins with a Quick Look module, based upon the Kosovo Air Campaign. The Quick Look’s goal is a timely review of the main concepts introduced in Block 2. The AFOD development team is particularly pleased with this project and knows students will appreciate the Quick Look as a useful and informative tool. The second module of Block 3 is titled “Operating for Effect,” and introduces new terminology and concepts. The subsequent two modules,

titled “Boots on the Ground” and “Ships at Sea,” focus upon Canada’s Army and Navy. Each examines basic concepts of its respective element and how both the Army and Navy are organized to fight.

The Systems Perspective examines military operations with an emphasis on how the Air Force gets its job done, and how it supports the other two elements. This perspective is presented based on the five doctrinal functions of aerospace power: Sense, Shape, Move, Sustain and Command. When completed, students will fully appreciate how the Environmental and Systems Perspectives emphasize operations.

The final perspective of Block 3 is the Team Perspective. This perspective focuses on people and teamwork and leverages content from the management, communications and leadership themes. This perspective addresses the fact that Air Force personnel generally work in teams, whether as flight crew, ground crew, staff, planning cells and others. The first examination is of “individuals of a team” and consists of a look at teams from their most basic composition—their individual members. Once this

is done, the focus is on the team as an entity through “a team of individuals.” The objective of the Team Perspective may change the way officers perceive teamwork and will increase the chance of ensuring their team is a high-performance team.

Conclusion

While completing AFOD is now mandated as part of the professional development requisite for advancement to the senior officer level, there are many other good reasons why junior officers are encouraged to register for the AFOD Program. Chief among these reasons is the fact the material is very relevant. The AFOD course development staff is composed of knowledgeable, experienced officers, each with at least two decades (some with three) of pan-Air Force experience. Many of the lessons they learned during their extensive careers are integrated in the syllabus. Simply put, knowing the material in this program will make you a better officer. ■

Link to the AFOD website: http://17wing.winnipeg.mil.ca/cfsas/afod/main_e.htm

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Major Rainer Wosnitza, a transport air navigator on staff at the Canadian Forces School of Aerospace Studies, is employed developing Air Force Officer Development course content. He has served two previous instructional postings at the Canadian Forces Air Navigator School, one posting to 1 Canadian Air Division Headquarters as a staff officer and two operational tours as a CC130 Hercules tactical air navigator. Prior to earning his wings, he spent eight years as a communications researcher, serving tours of duty twice at CFS Inuvik and CFS Alert, and once each at CFS Bermuda and the Communications Security Establishment in Ottawa. He holds an undergraduate degree from the University of Manitoba, majoring in history.

List of Abbreviations

AFOD	Air Force Officer Development	DL	distance learning
CF	Canadian Forces	OFFP	operationally functional point
CFSAS	Canadian Forces School of Aerospace Studies	OPME	Officer Professional Military Education