

BASIC OFFICER LEADER COURSE

THE ‘SO WHAT’ IN JUNIOR OFFICER EDUCATION TODAY

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“New lieutenants are first rate. They are experts at few things other than figuring out EVERYTHING. The lieutenants can think — and that’s what we need; thinking leaders who are confident, fit, and willing to make a decision with little information about the issue at hand or experience dealing with the issues. They are comfortable with an 80-percent solution now vs. a 100-percent solution never.”



— **Compilation of serving battalion and brigade commanders’ written feedback from the Basic Officer Leader Course (BOLC) survey conducted by the U.S. Army Infantry Center and School at Fort Benning, Georgia, in Fiscal Year 2007**

In June 2006, Officer Education System (OES) transformation made a giant stride forward with the formal implementation of the three phases of the Basic Officer Leader Course (BOLC). BOLC I consists of pre-commissioning training and education. BOLC II occurs immediate post commissioning and is generally considered Initial Entry Training for officers falling under the broader title of Initial Military Training. BOLC III (Infantry BOLC in the case of infantry officers) is the follow-on to BOLC II that covers branch-specific technical and tactical training and education. Each branch and center conducts BOLC III based on Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) and branch/center commandant guidance.

Given the nature of the current operational environment and the overall progress of Army Transformation, the next logical step in junior officer development was codifying changes in the OES. The programs of instruction implemented in June 2006 for BOLC were the result of several experiments and pilot programs conducted at Fort Benning; Fort Sill, Oklahoma; and a few other locations. Two years after formal implementation, more than 13,000 junior officers have completed the BOLC II program at either Fort Benning or Fort Sill. Regardless of the number of graduates and implementation timeline, the field remains confused regarding what BOLC and specifically BOLC II is and is not.

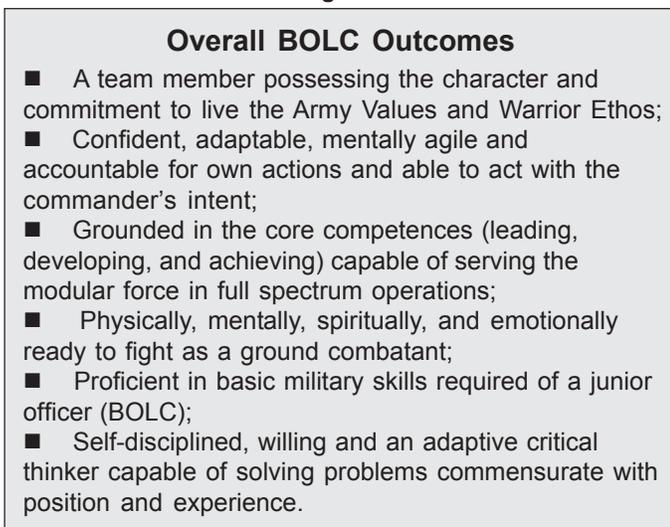
To place BOLC II in the appropriate context, one must first be familiar with the overall BOLC Outcomes (see Figure 1). The overall BOLC Outcomes were developed at the April 2008 Army Accessions Command BOLC Conference. The

purpose of the April conference was to review the common core task list for all phases of BOLC. The assembled group from Army Accessions Command, Cadet Command, U.S. Military Academy (USMA), Federal Officer Candidate School (OCS), BOLC II sites (Fort Benning and Fort Sill), and BOLC III sites agreed to approach the common core task review after adopting an outcomes-based approach to training.

Therefore the initial step was to determine the overall BOLC outcomes and subsequently develop nested individual BOLC I, II and III outcomes. The outcomes were developed along six lines of operation consistent with the latest version of FM 6-22, *Army Leadership*, and previous discussion regarding core BOLC competencies. The six competencies were Leadership, Officership, Personal Development, Army Values and Ethics, Technical Competence, and Tactical Competence. As common core tasks were reviewed, they were linked to one of the six competencies as well as one or more level of BOLC. Each task included in a specific competency for a specific BOLC level was also labeled with the level of training, familiarization, proficiency, or mastery that the task could or should be trained to achieve the desired outcome.

Based on feedback from graduates of the BOLC II program, it was clear that inbound students, students in the course, course graduates, and receiving units in the operational force did not understand what BOLC was designed to accomplish. Additionally, new cadre members were struggling to understand what BOLC was designed to accomplish for the OES. In addition to the newly approved BOLC Outcomes, the 199th Infantry Brigade, command and control headquarters for BOLC I, II and III, developed a simple chart to illustrate how outcomes might be leveraged (see Figure 2).

Figure 1



The 199th looked at the mission statement for BOLC and with the desired outcomes in mind developed Figure 2 to illustrate the “what” and “how” of the profession of arms. “What” is really the science and knowledge that an officer must have proficiency in order to be competent and confident in the role and duty as an officer leader. “How” is really the art of applying the science/knowledge to novel situations and environments. We need and want junior officer leaders to effectively

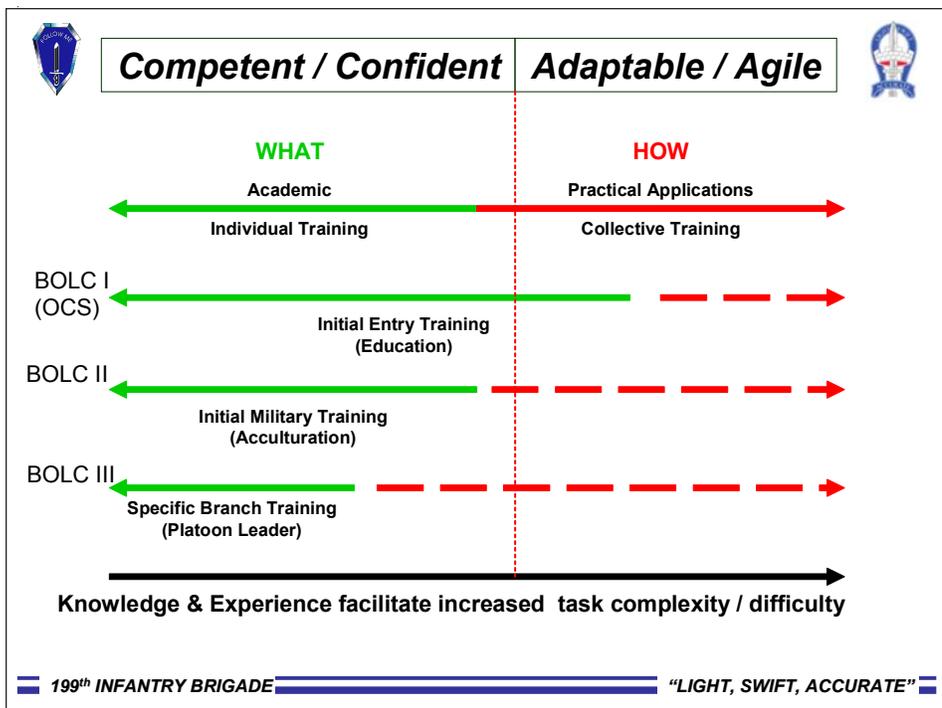


Figure 2

and innovatively solve problems. Correctly coached, taught and mentored, the junior officer should achieve the desired outcome and require less and less science reinforcement as they progress through the discrete phases of BOLC. Successful completion of each phase of BOLC theoretically enables the junior officer to analyze and handle increasingly more complex problem sets in and out of the operational environment.

Basic Officer Leadership Course I

BOLC I encompasses the training that officers receive during their pre-commissioning experience. This training is generally associated with the respective commissioning source, such as the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC); USMA; OCS or direct commissioning in selective branches. The outcomes for BOLC I (Figure 3) acknowledge that newly commissioned officers have all of the enthusiasm but virtually none of the experience required to conduct their duties as a commissioned officer.

Basic Officer Leadership Course II

BOLC II is a six-week course that trains, educates, and acculturates second lieutenants to develop competent, confident, and adaptable officers able to lead Soldiers in any environment. The course

acculturates junior officers into the profession of arms. This phase of BOLC gradually inspires officers to accept more and more personal responsibility and transition from whatever they were previously to newly commissioned members

of the profession of arms. The six-week course raises officers of all branches to a common baseline in warrior tasks and battle drills. Additionally, the course cross-levels the knowledge and experience of disparate commissioning sources to create an environment of teamwork and cooperation. Officers transform from mere participants in training events and operations to leader participants that focus on planning, synchronizing, and resourcing training events and operations. Lieutenants learn individual responsibility, self-discipline, and self-respect and actively demonstrate and live the seven core Army Values.

Basic Officer Leadership Course III

BOLC III is the branch-specific phase of training for each newly commissioned lieutenant. Depending on the branch, BOLC II may be the last location prior to arrival at the first unit of assignment in which the junior officer is trained and practices leadership in a field environment. Branch/center commandants are responsible for oversight on program of instruction (POI) content and desired outcomes that will effectively achieve technical and tactical competence. BOLC III is conducted as soon as practical following completion of BOLC II.

Figure 3

BOLC I Outcomes

- Values and Ethics**
* Newly commissioned/appointed officer who knows and understands Army Values and begins to demonstrate them;
- Leadership**
* Demonstrates knowledge of core leadership attributes and competencies and applies fundamentals of leadership at team and squad levels;
- Officership**
* Understands and embraces the concept of officership;
- Personal Development**
* Understands responsibilities of an officer for self-development (physical, mental, spiritual and emotional) outside the institutional and organizational domains;
- Technical Competence**
* Possesses fundamental knowledge and understanding of basic military skills and Army management systems required of a junior officer;
- Tactical Competence**
* Possesses basic military skills and demonstrates knowledge of the orders process and troop leading procedures while executing small unit tactics;
* Experiences an introduction to Warrior Tasks and Battle Drills and fundamentals of Army operations.

BOLC II Outcomes

- Values and Ethics**
 - * Junior officer who demonstrates Army Values and applies them to personal and professional decision making;
- Leadership**
 - * Applies core leadership attributes and competencies, and demonstrate proficiency at team and squad levels;
- Officership**
 - * Accepts and demonstrates new roles and responsibilities as a member of the profession of arms;
- Personal Development**
 - * Applies responsibilities of an officer for self-development (physical, mental, spiritual and emotional) outside the institutional and organizational domains;
 - * Understands responsibilities to inspire self-development in subordinates;
- Technical Competence**
 - * Practices the application of technical aspects of warrior tasks and battle drills;
 - * Applies Army management systems and sustainment functions;
- Tactical Competence**
 - * Applies troop leading procedures;
 - * Applies critical thinking and problem solving;
 - * Understands and applies warrior task and battle drills and fundamentals of Army operations.

Figure 4

Certainly one of the by-products of the approved BOLC Outcomes is expectation management for the inbound and in-session students. Previous student complaints centered on the seemingly redundant tasks that officers received training on in BOLC I, BOLC II and BOLC III. As previously stated, the outcomes are validation that junior officers are not experientially prepared or professionally mature enough immediately upon commissioning to assume all of their expected duties and responsibilities. BOLC provides the foundational training in a sequential and progressive manner to ground junior officers in Warrior Tasks and Battle Drills (WTBD), imbue them with the warrior ethos, transition them from participants to leader participants to leaders, and finally fully embrace and actively demonstrate the Army Values.

A second by-product is the broader understanding by the BOLC cadre of their key role and broad responsibility to effectively train, coach, teach and mentor these junior officers during every phase of BOLC. Further, they must understand that each phase is inextricably linked to the previous and next phase of BOLC. Ultimately the linkage continues to the first unit of assignment. Cadre today are influencing and impacting the near, mid and long term professionalism and competence of the Army based on the solid foundation built during BOLC. The professionalism that each cadre member brings from his respective branch and/or Military Occupational Specialty is significantly improved during his tenure and transferred back to the respective branch or MOS upon PCS from BOLC.

Lastly, a third by-product involves the leadership at the first unit of assignment. The developmental process is not complete as

BOLC III Outcomes

- Values and Ethics**
 - * Junior officer who embodies, lives and defends the Army Values;
- Leadership**
 - * Possesses attributes and competencies to assess, train, and lead in their first unit of assignment;
- Officership**
 - * Applies roles and responsibilities at first unit of assignment;
- Personal Development**
 - * Demonstrates self-development and an understanding of the life long learning process for themselves and future subordinates;
 - * Advances personal and professional development as the future of the Army;
- Technical Competence**
 - * Demonstrates technical skills proficiency for individual branch integration as a member of the combined arms team;
 - * As a leader applies Army management systems and sustainment functions;
- Tactical Competence**
 - * Makes appropriate decisions based on doctrine (includes troop leading procedures), assessment, critical thinking and judgment to provide a solution to a tactical problem;
 - * Functions as a leader in employing warrior task and battle drills and branch-defined technical and tactical skills;
 - * Adapts TLPs and problem-solving skills to branch specific mission support requirements;
 - * Executes branch defined missions in support of full spectrum operations.

Figure 5

junior officers depart their BOLC III sites. Additional development is necessary and required from the Soldiers, NCOs and officers at the first units of assignment and during training, operation, and combat deployments. In this manner, unit leadership knows via the BOLC Outcomes what a junior officer should be capable of and what his experience has been. Therefore informed leaders will have tempered their expectations and will devise additional training and development appropriate for their junior officers.

This short overview of the BOLC program cannot possibly answer all of the questions that remain in leaders' minds. The cadre from the 199th in partnership with other BOLC sites stands ready to address your questions and comments. Additionally, we invite you to investigate our Web sites and products as well as visit Fort Benning and the BOLC I, BOLC II, and BOLC III programs resident in the 199th Infantry Brigade.

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