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A BALANCING ACT: PEDAGOGY IN POSTGRADUATE SPACE EDUCATION FOR MILITARY
OFFICERS

Abstract

The importance of teaching about the space domain has increased in professional military education (PME) over the last ten years. However, the recent establishment of the U.S. Space Force and other challenges could undermine military officers' postgraduate space education. At the U.S. Air Command and Staff College (ACSC), for example, most space officers now take their classes solely with other space officers, thus diminishing interaction and the sharing of knowledge with officers in the fields of air power and cyber power.

As a result, professional military education runs the risk of becoming increasingly segregated, as PME aims not only to teach through professor-student interactions but also through student-student interactions. Air and cyber professionals will graduate with less knowledge of the space domain unless the amount of education devoted to space increases or the quality of coverage improves.

As it is unlikely in the near future that the U.S. staff colleges will devote substantially more time to the space domain, this presentation will compare and contrast the advantages and disadvantages of two pedagogical theories: Socratic learning and problem-based learning. Socratic learning represents the traditional preference of most U.S. staff colleges, although problem-based learning is receiving increased attention.

Which one, or what balance of the two, will best ensure students engage in active learning to grasp and retain key issues, theories, and topics essential to effective postgraduate space education? To answer this question, I will draw upon past syllabi, assignments, student papers, and student course feedback at ACSC. I will also conduct focus meetings with ACSC students and survey professors at a range of U.S., Australian, and British PME institutions to gain insights into how students can best engage with postgraduate space education and how teaching the space domain has changed over the last decade.