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RESEARCH IN SUPPORT OF THE DEFENSE CIVILIAN TRAINING CORPS (DCTC) PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT, PILOTING, AND INSTRUMENTATION

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Executive Summary

To remain competitive, efficient, and effective, the Department of Defense (DoD) must make an enterprise shift to strategically develop talent who fill critical workforce skill gaps. This workforce for the future must be trained now to leverage evolving commercially and globally available technologies to immediately contribute to solving challenging national security problems and responding to current and future threats. The Defense Civilian Training Corps (DCTC) program is an essential element of the DoD's effort to revive the warrior ethos in the civilian acquisition workforce, rebuild our military, and reestablish deterrence with an emphasis on mission outcomes, efficiency, effectiveness, accountability, standards, readiness, and performance-based assessments.

DCTC is a congressionally mandated talent development program, codified in Chapter 113 of Title 10 U.S. Code § 2200g-j. It addresses critical skill gaps through a multidisciplinary scholarship-for-service model that combines active learning in the classroom with project-based internships at DoD organizations to develop the critical thinking and mission-driven mindset needed to spur innovation in the defense acquisition ecosystem. Analogous in some ways to the Senior Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) program for military officers, DCTC is a highly selective civil servant development pathway that includes tuition support, stipends, immersive coursework, real-world experience, and a security clearance for critically needed acquisition careers.

Since launching in August 2023, DCTC has expanded across multiple universities and selected three cohorts:

- **Cohort '25:** Inaugural class (August 2023-May 2025)
- **Cohort '26:** In-progress (August 2024-May 2025)
- **Cohort '27:** Selected (August 2025-May 2027), with planned expansion to test a revised DCTC model

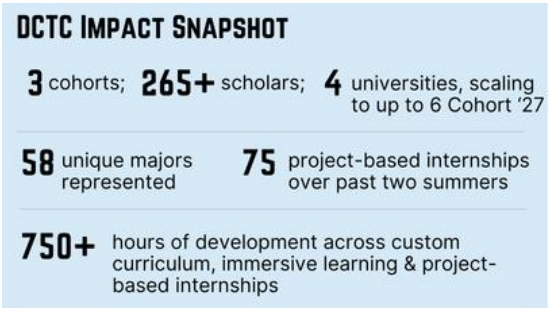

Figure 1. DCTC impact snapshot

As of July 2025, DCTC includes four participating universities and 270 scholars across its first three cohorts, with additional universities and scholars expected to join in Fall 2025 as part of Cohort '27. The program's design is based on and distinguished by a unique, targeted and integrated curriculum. The four key elements include:

1. The core DCTC curriculum,
2. Immersive learning experiences,
3. Project-based summer internships, and
4. A senior project that addresses real DoD challenges.

Through this approach, scholars gain transferable, mission-relevant skills and knowledge to jump-start their careers and be productive members of the DoD acquisition community immediately upon graduation.

DCTC is an example of the "talent factory" model, a strategic, scalable, and adaptive talent development model designed to rigorously prepare the civilian workforce needed to meet ever-evolving national security challenges. Just as the defense industrial base requires steady investment to ensure readiness, so too must the DoD invest in its talent production capacity. The talent factory is a weapon to achieve peace through strength.

DCTC is a transformative innovation beyond traditional and isolated hiring pipelines. It educates and develops exceptional scholars, based on merit and critical skills, capable of collaborating across disciplines and with the private sector to procure and protect mission-critical operational capabilities. DCTC builds national security leaders for today and beyond.

While program implementation has required adjustments, particularly to clarify roles, support faculty, streamline communications, and clarify pathways to employment, DCTC has been agile in responding rapidly and effectively. Lessons learned have been applied, from evolving curriculum delivery to testing a new partner-driven model for Cohort '27 that empowers DoD organizations to directly select scholars and host universities from the outset. This shift increases ownership, placement predictability, and alignment with DoD hiring needs.

The bottom line: **DCTC is a proven solution to the documented national security workforce skills and preparation gap.** It is cost-effective, impactful, and scalable. The scholars are delivering. The universities are committed. The DoD partners are providing internship challenges and are interested in hiring. The program will continue with Cohort '27 and continue exploring expansion and scaling options.

University of Arizona DCTC Scholars on site at their summer internship.

North Carolina A&T DCTC Scholars on site at their summer internship.

Purdue University DCTC Scholars on campus

Introduction

The Defense Civilian Training Corps (DCTC) was established by Congress and codified in U.S. Code Title 10, Chapter 113 to address a clear and growing need to strengthen the pipeline of ready, resilient, and strategically prepared civilian leaders in the Department of Defense (DoD). In partnership with the Office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment (OUSD(A&S)), the Acquisition Innovation Research Center (AIRC), an applied research center with a vast academic network, was engaged to rapidly operationalize DCTC.

DCTC is a testbed for transformation -- a novel "talent factory" that shifts development left, builds skills that are transferable across the defense ecosystem, and establishes a cycle of "learn, unlearn, relearn" to ensure DoD has the talent it needs when it needs it. DCTC integrates scholarship-for-service, project-based teamwork in the classroom, as well as summer internships, and active security clearances. This approach is designed to meet emerging and enduring talent needs across the defense ecosystem, reinforcing a warrior ethos within the acquisition workforce that emphasizes mission outcomes, readiness, and accountability.

The program's design reflects strategic acceleration. In 2023, OUSD(A&S) and AIRC launched the inaugural cohort a full year ahead of Congressional expectations, enabling earlier feedback cycles and informed iteration. Agility remains central to DCTC's execution, with each of the three cohorts, Cohort '25, '26 and '27, offering a window into scaling what works, adapting what doesn't, and preparing for long-term implementation.

DCTC complements, but is distinct from, other DoD talent initiatives like Science, Mathematics, and Research for Transformation (SMART), DoD Cyber Service Academy (CSA, formerly the DoD Cyber Scholarship Program), and Senior Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC). It uniquely targets roles related to the DoD acquisition mission across technical and non-technical domains, with scholars prepared to join multidisciplinary teams and support rapid capability delivery.

This report provides Congress, DoD, and executive branch stakeholders with an update on DCTC's implementation, outcomes, and alignment with legislative intent.

Legislative Background and Purpose

Statutory Authority and Mandate

DCTC is required by Chapter 113 of Title 10, United States Code, and was originally authorized in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) Section 860.[1] The FY2023 NDAA Sec. 833 amended and expanded the authority.

The statute mandates:

> The Secretary of Defense, **acting through the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment, shall establish and maintain a Defense Civilian Training Corps program**, organized into one or more units, at any accredited civilian educational institution authorized to grant baccalaureate degrees.[2]
> — *10 U.S.C. § 2200g(a)*

The provision affirms that DCTC is a statutorily required initiative, with the explicit purpose of supporting the DoD's strategic readiness through talent development. In addition,

> The Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment **shall use** the resources and programs of the acquisition research organization within a civilian college or university that is described under section 4142(a) of this title (commonly referred to as **the 'Acquisition Innovation Research Center') to carry out the requirements** of this chapter.[3]
> — *FY2023 NDAA Sec. 833*

This enables the use of AIRC as a supporting partner to carry out DCTC objectives, allowing for flexibility in implementation while leveraging a networked academic ecosystem.

The broader framework of 10 U.S.C. § 2200h establishes specific programmatic elements that the Secretary of Defense must define and manage, including:

- Identifying and tracking critical skill gaps;
- Establishing eligibility and financial assistance criteria;
- Defining service obligations and pathways to DoD employment; and
- Setting institutional participation standards.

These statutory requirements underpin the DCTC design, evaluation, methods, and operational model.

[1] Public Law 116-92. National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020. Sec. 860 Establishment of Defense Civilian Training Corps. https://www.congress.gov/116/statute/STATUTE-133/STATUTE-133-Pg1198.pdf.

[2] 10 U.S. Code, Chapter 113—Defense Civilian Training Corps. Sec. 2200g. Establishment. https://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?req=granuleid%3AUSC-prelim-title10-chapter113&edition=prelim.

[3] Public Law 117-263. James M. Inhofe National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023. Sec. 833 Modifications to Defense Civilian Training Corps. https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/7776. See also 10 U.S. Code, Sec. 2200g(b).

Program Purpose

The statutory purpose of DCTC is stated in (b):

> The purpose of the Defense Civilian Training Corps is to **target critical skills gaps** necessary to achieve the objectives of the national defense strategies…by preparing students selected for the Defense Civilian Training Corps for Department of Defense **careers relating to acquisition, digital technologies, critical technologies, science, engineering, finance, and other civilian occupations determined by the Secretary of Defense.**[4]

This mandate positions DCTC as a strategic mechanism for producing a new generation of civilian leaders capable of delivering on the Department's modernization and readiness priorities. As the defense environment becomes increasingly complex, demanding rapid adaptation, digital fluency, and multi-domain collaboration, DCTC is structured to develop job-ready talent that can operate with agility and mission focus.

In alignment with Secretary of Defense Hegseth's priorities, DCTC serves as a foundational tool for reviving the Department's warrior ethos among its civilian ranks, reinforcing the values of mission-first performance, merit-based service, and operational readiness. It contributes directly to the Secretary's call to rebuild the Department through unconventional approaches that are disruptive by design, laser-focused on lethality, and grounded in accountability.

While the Department has several established programs that build specialized skill sets, DCTC responds to a different challenge: the need to produce resilient, multidisciplinary civilian talent at scale and with intent. It is designed to serve as a **steady-state production model**—a talent factory—capable of anticipating and responding to evolving operational demands. Existing mechanisms typically begin talent development post-hire. DCTC, on the other hand, starts talent development two years before the hiring date, screening candidates to align with merit-based initiatives, developing mission-aligned talent during their academic careers, obtaining security clearances, and conducting extended interviews through project-based internships. DCTC reduces civilian workforce onboarding time and increases early-career mission impact.

[4] 10 U.S. Code, Chapter 113—Defense Civilian Training Corps. Sec. 2200g. Establishment. https://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?req=granuleid%3AUSC-prelim-title10-chapter113&edition=prelim.

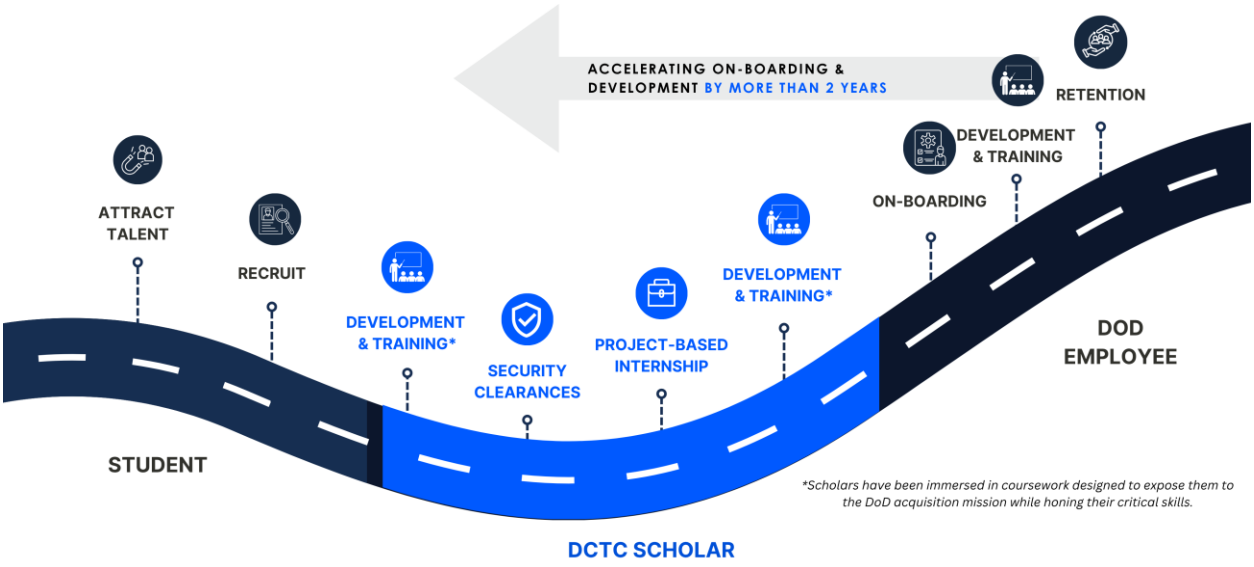

Figure 2. DCTC accelerating onboarding and development by more than 2 years

DCTC is not a replacement for other existing scholarship-for-service programs, such as Science, Mathematics, and Research for Transformation (SMART), DoD Cyber Service Academy (CSA) and Senior Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC). The focus on multidisciplinary talent and skills building and on civilian talent distinguishes DCTC as a complementary and necessary component of a larger workforce transformation agenda. DCTC is not meant as a replacement for other programs, but these programs cannot address the current reality that annual hiring needs already far exceed outputs—a gap that will only continue to grow. DCTC's innovation approach of developing talent pre-graduation is a wise investment: a cost-effective, scalable model that yields results and delivers a workforce ready to make an immediate impact upon graduation.

By combining early education, experiential learning, service commitment, and close coordination with hiring authorities, DCTC enables a proactive and scalable approach to talent development— grounded in statute and fulfilling both congressional direction and the Department's strategic intent to build a mission-ready, accountable, and lethal civilian workforce.

Clarifying Legislative Context

While 10 U.S.C. Chapter 113 defines the legal foundation of the program, additional legislative artifacts, particularly congressional reports and explanatory language, provide important insight into congressional expectations and program alignment. Senate bill S. 2296 (Report 119-39) would modify 10 U.S.C. §1104 by providing special hiring authorities. The Charmain's Mark to House bill H.,R. 3838 in Section 823 would also provide for development and employment of DCTC members.

The Joint Explanatory Statement (JES) accompanying the FY2023 NDAA encourages collaboration with organizations such as the National Security Innovation Network (NSIN), the Chief Digital and Artificial Intelligence Office (CDAO), the Under Secretary of Defense for

Research and Engineering (USD(R&E)) and ROTC commanders.[5] While these entities are not legislatively mandated participants, DCTC has prioritized active dialogue and engagement with these to support strategic alignment.

Moreover, the Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) has expressed continued support in its report accompanying the FY2025 NDAA. The committee emphasized "**DCTC provides a unique pathway for the DoD to introduce college students to a career in national security"** [6] and "**great promise in expansion of this program to a wider set of institutions."**[7] The committee further articulated the value of expanding DCTC to acquisition-adjacent disciplines such as testing, requirements, generation, finance, and accounting. The committee applauded early implementation efforts and encouraged deeper outreach within the DoD to generate a demand signal for DCTC graduates.

DCTC has been structured with these congressional directives and intents in mind, striking a balance between statutory obligations and adaptive execution. DCTC also aligns with and supports the President's recognition that "the defense acquisition workforce is a national strategic asset that will be decisive in any conflict" and setting priorities for improving acquisition by "modernizing the duties and composition of the defense acquisition workforce" (Executive Order 14265). This structure reflects both compliance and responsiveness, ensuring that the program is agile to meet statutory requirements and evolve in alignment with defense policy priorities and workforce needs.

[5] Joint Explanatory Statement to Accompany the James M. Inhofe National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023. https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/fy23_ndaa_joint_explanatory_statement.pdf.
[6] Senate Report 118-188. National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2025. https://www.congress.gov/congressional-report/118th-congress/senate-report/188/1?outputFormat=pdf.
[7] Ibid

Program Structure and Governance

Role of OUSD(A&S)

DCTC is sponsored by the OUSD(A&S), which holds statutory responsibility for establishing and maintaining the program in accordance with 10 U.S.C. § 2200g. Oversight and implementation authority is delegated to the Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Acquisition (ASD(A)). Within ASD(A), the DCTC Program Office is responsible for establishing program policy and coordinating stakeholder input from across the DoD and Congress. The Program Office plays a critical role in overseeing compliance, shaping guidance, and championing the program's alignment with acquisition workforce needs and national security objectives. This role has been demonstrated in practice, for example, by securing a hiring exemption for DCTC scholars during the Department's broader civilian hiring freeze. This decision reflects the DoD's commitment to ensuring the program can deliver on its statutory intent: connecting prepared talent to the acquisition workforce.

Implementation Partners

DCTC is designed and led by the AIRC, under contract to OUSD(A&S). AIRC is responsible for the full lifecycle of implementation, including program design, operational coordination, stakeholder engagement, and real-time adaptation. Established by Congress in the FY2020 NDAA and housed at the Systems Engineering Research Center (SERC), a University-Affiliated Research Center (UARC) under 10 U.S.C. § 4142, AIRC provides a unique bridge between academic innovation and DoD workforce transformation efforts. AIRC manages a national academic network of 20+ partner universities and leads the effort to identify DoD critical skills, recruit and select scholars, develop the DCTC curriculum in alignment with DoD critical skills, execute immersive learning events, track scholar development, select project-based summer internships, manage scholar matching, identify DoD Strategic Partners, and manage the overall program evaluation framework.

AIRC executes this work in partnership with the following:

- **Strategic Partners (DoD Organizations):** These partners represent the demand side of the talent pipeline. They identify workforce needs, vet the critical skills upon which the DCTC curriculum is based, host summer internships and immersive learning events, mentor scholars, and provide direct pathways to employment. Their involvement ensures the DCTC curriculum is grounded in mission needs and reinforces the transition from learning to impact.
- **Universities:** Four universities were selected through a structured, data-informed process that emphasized institutional readiness, a track record of national security alignment, and the capacity to support multidisciplinary talent development. Selection factors included accreditation, land-grant status, designation as R1 or R2 research institutions, existing ROTC programs, participation in the AIRC university network, and demonstrated ability to support both technical and policy-focused education. Additional considerations included regional accessibility, tuition structure, and the presence of complementary programs such as national security institutes or University-Affiliated Research Centers (UARCs).

Current DCTC institutions include **North Carolina A&T, Purdue University, The University of Arizona, and Virginia Tech**, with additional universities as part of Cohort '27. These institutions serve as operational anchors of the DCTC program—delivering the integrated curriculum, supporting scholar success, and providing ongoing feedback that informs program improvement and scalability.

These partners form the foundation of the DCTC talent factory—an integrated, adaptive network that collectively builds a pipeline of ready, resilient, and mission-aligned future leaders for the DoD civilian workforce.

Collaborative Entities

In alignment with the congressional direction included in the FY23 NDAA Sec 833 and reinforced in the JES and by the SASC, DCTC has made deliberate efforts to establish collaborative relationships across the DoD. These engagements reflect the Department's intent to treat DCTC as a whole-of-DoD initiative, informed by lessons learned and aligned to broader department and national innovation and talent modernization efforts.

With the support of the executive sponsor, OUSD(A&S) launched a quarterly Joint DoD Talent Management Programs Roundtable, a collaborative engagement across DoD's senior talent leadership. This roundtable convenes programs such as SMART, the DoD CSA, McCain Fellows, and DCTC to:

- Strengthen coordination and build a community of practice
- Exchange lessons learned and clarify distinctions among programs
- Identify opportunities to reduce friction in civilian hiring
- Leverage shared infrastructure and best practices across efforts

DCTC has also engaged with the Army's Senior ROTC and the U.S. Military Academy (West Point) education team to exchange insights on talent development, curriculum design, and national security education strategy. These efforts strengthen shared understanding between military and civilian education pathways and ensure that DCTC continues to learn from and collaborate with long-standing, mission-driven programs.

In collaboration with the NSIN and Defense Innovation Unit (DIU), DCTC has continued to build connections across the DoD's education and innovation communities. These partnerships have enabled DCTC to evaluate and incorporate proven, mission-aligned learning models that enhance scholar preparation and real-world problem-solving capabilities.

DCTC's project-based curriculum reflects a continued commitment to identifying high-impact practices and embedding them into the program structure where appropriate. DCTC has adapted the type of project-based learning that programs like Hacking for Defense (H4D) have proven effective over the past 10 years. The DCTC 401 and 402 courses go beyond H4D to support mission-relevant employability skills, as illustrated in Figure 3, development and strengthen alignment with innovation-focused DoD entities that sponsor the projects scholars tackle in multidisciplinary teams. This approach supports DCTC's broader goal of delivering best-in-class educational experiences while reinforcing our strategic posture as an integrated, forward-leaning component of the Department's civilian talent ecosystem.

Program Elements

Identifying and Targeting Critical Skills

The DCTC Program was established "to target critical skill gaps necessary to achieve the objectives of the national defense strategies... by preparing students selected for the [DCTC] for Department of Defense careers relating to acquisition, digital technologies, critical technologies, science, engineering, finance and other civilian occupations determined by the Secretary of Defense" [10 U.S.C. § 2200g(b)].

In its second year of implementation, DCTC has built upon its foundation by continuing to identify, validate, and refine the critical skills needed across the DoD civilian workforce. The program leverages a multi-pronged methodology—including blending natural language processing (NLP), existing DoD frameworks, academic research, and strategic partner input—to ensure that program design aligns with evolving mission requirements.

Since the previous report from November 2024, DCTC has further integrated this methodology and analysis into its operations by mapping the five identified DCTC skill clusters, shown in Figure 3, directly into curriculum design, immersive experiences, and scholar development frameworks. The result is a program that is informed by data and grounded in mission relevance at every stage of scholar preparation.

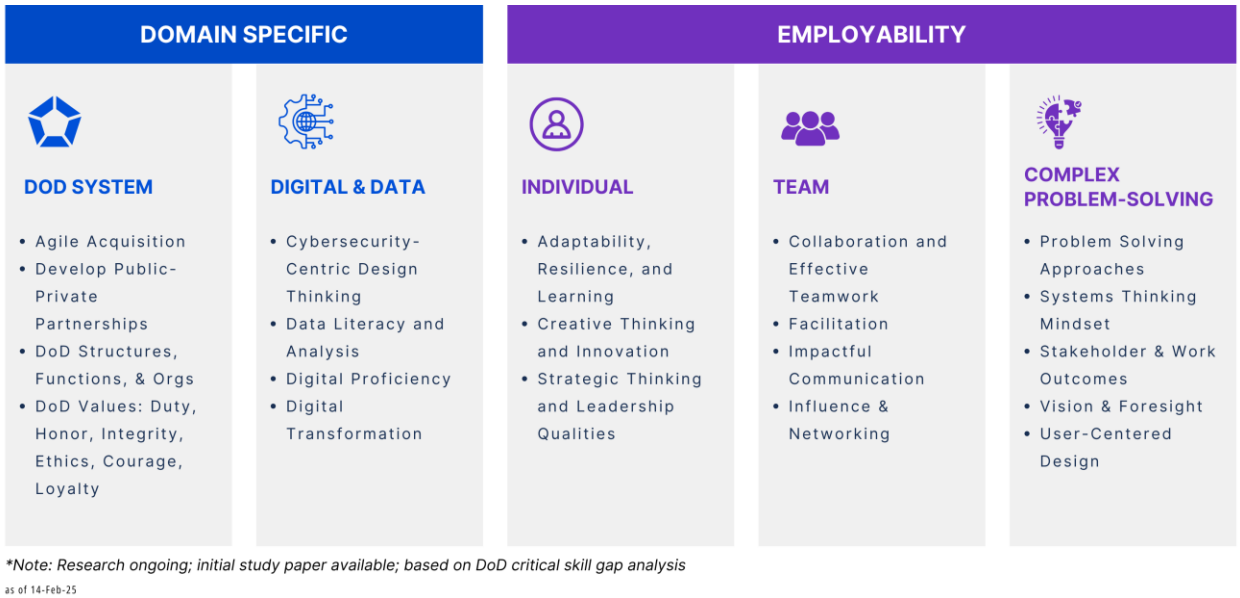

Figure 3. DCTC critical skills

These skill clusters represent the critical capabilities required for early career success in acquisition and acquisition-adjacent roles:

- **The DoD System**: Understanding of warfighter missions, acquisition system processes, stakeholders, and the national security landscape
- **Digital & Data**: Fluency in data interpretation, modeling, digital tools, and technologies shaping modern operations
- **Individual**: Self-management, communication, and strategic decision-making

- **Team**: Collaboration, leadership, and the ability to contribute effectively in multidisciplinary teams
- **Complex Problem-Solving**: Problem-solving approaches, systems-level reasoning, and the ability to deliver practical, mission-driven solutions at speed and scale

This framework is the product of layered research and practical validation. Initial insights were drawn from over 80 government, industry, and academic studies analyzed using NLP techniques. In parallel, AIRC integrated and adapted lessons from the HELIX model[8]—developed by the SERC UARC—that assess systems engineering effectiveness and adaptability.

Crucially, these clusters have been directly validated by our DoD Strategic Partners through internship placement feedback and program engagement. Partners ranked the relative importance of the five clusters as illustrated in Figure 4.

This DoD-based priority ranking is now used to calibrate the balance and emphasis of scholar development activities throughout the program. For example, DCTC development, through curriculum, immersive learning, and project-based internships, is aligned to address the most emphasized areas.

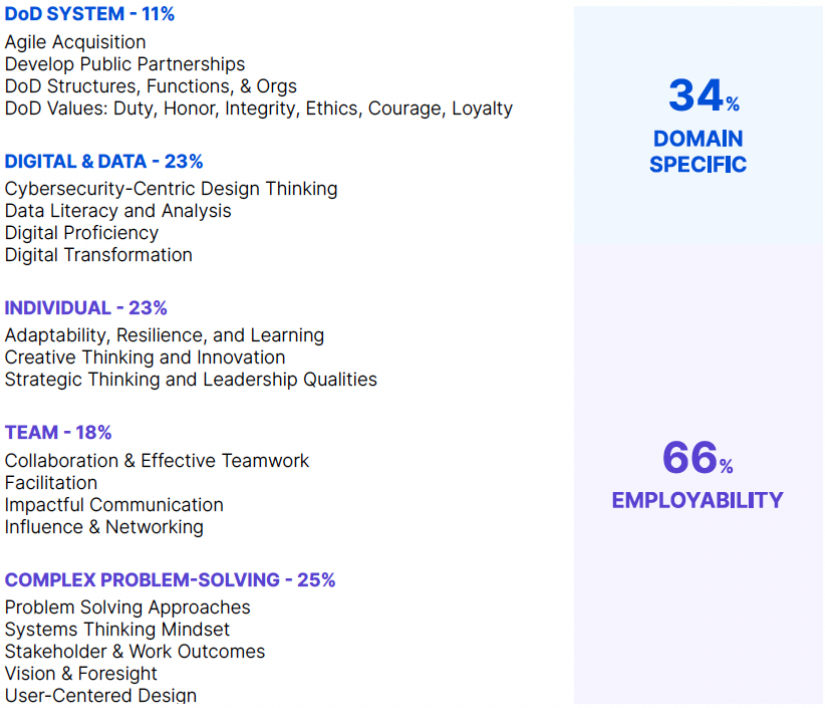

Figure 4. DoD priority preference for DCTC skill development

As a result, the DCTC program now features a fully operational feedback loop, linking skill gap identification to curriculum mapping, implementation, and outcome assessment. The program design, selection of learning objectives, internship roles, and final capstone experiences are all informed by this feedback loop model.

Looking forward, AIRC will continue to refine the underlying methodology, leveraging the partner feedback, NLP tools, and HELIX framework to ensure that DCTC evolves with strategic priorities and mission needs. This iterative approach allows the program to remain adaptive, responsive, and firmly anchored in its statutory goal: producing the next generation of ready, resilient, and mission-aligned civilian talent.

[8] Hutchison, N. A. C.; Verma, D.; Burke, P.; et al. SERC Technical Report SERC-2020-TR-007-A. Systems Engineering Research Center, Stevens Institute of Technology; July 7, 2020. https://sercproddata.s3.us-east-2.amazonaws.com/technical_reports/reports/1602166204-A013_SERC%20WRT%201004_Technical%20Report%20SERC-2020-TR-007.pdf.

Performance and Impact Tracking

From its inception, DCTC was designed as a prototype with a purpose: to deliver educational and developmental experiences and project-based internship placements and also to generate actionable insights that can inform broader DoD talent development strategies. AIRC has established a robust performance and impact tracking framework grounded in national standards and designed to support continuous learning and informed decision-making.

An Evaluation Framework Built for Learning and Accountability

The DCTC evaluation approach blends best practices from ABET (a standard for educational program quality), GAO guidance (focused on government program effectiveness), and DCTC's unique mission to develop civilians with the critical skills required for the DoD acquisition mission.

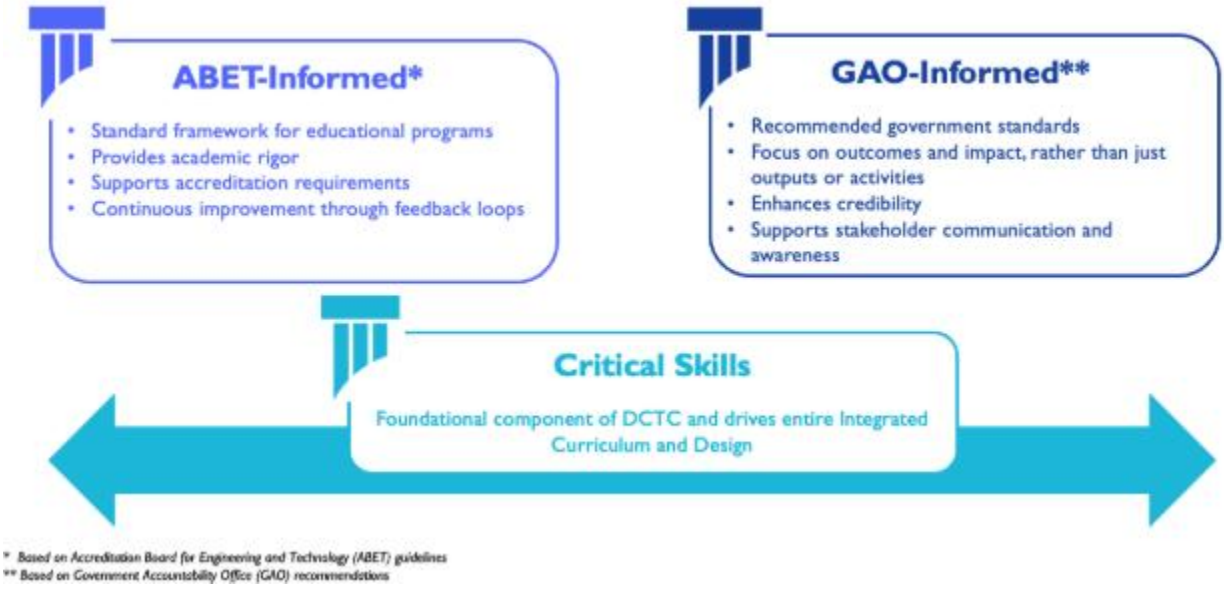

Figure 5. The three pillars of DCTC Metrics and Measures efforts

This hybrid model incorporates multiple types of evaluation:

- **Process (Implementation)**: Are program activities being executed as designed?
- **Outcomes**: Are scholars acquiring the readiness, skills, and experiences necessary for DoD employment?
- **Cost Effectiveness**: Are program investments yielding scalable, efficient results?
- **Impact**: Is the program contributing to longer-term workforce development outcomes?

This structure enables us to assess progress and identify levers for improvement, ensuring DCTC continues to meet its objectives and adapts as needed. Together, these frameworks support a holistic evaluation model across three interconnected levels:

- **Loop I (Element Level)**: Assesses each program component (e.g., courses, project-based internships, mentoring)

- **Loop II (Program Level)**: Aggregates metrics related to program quality, scholar progression, and university performance
- **Loop III (Mission Level)**: Measures long-term outcomes such as workforce readiness, placement, and overall DoD acquisition mission impact value

This multi-loop structure allows for granular improvements while supporting strategic priorities and policy alignment.

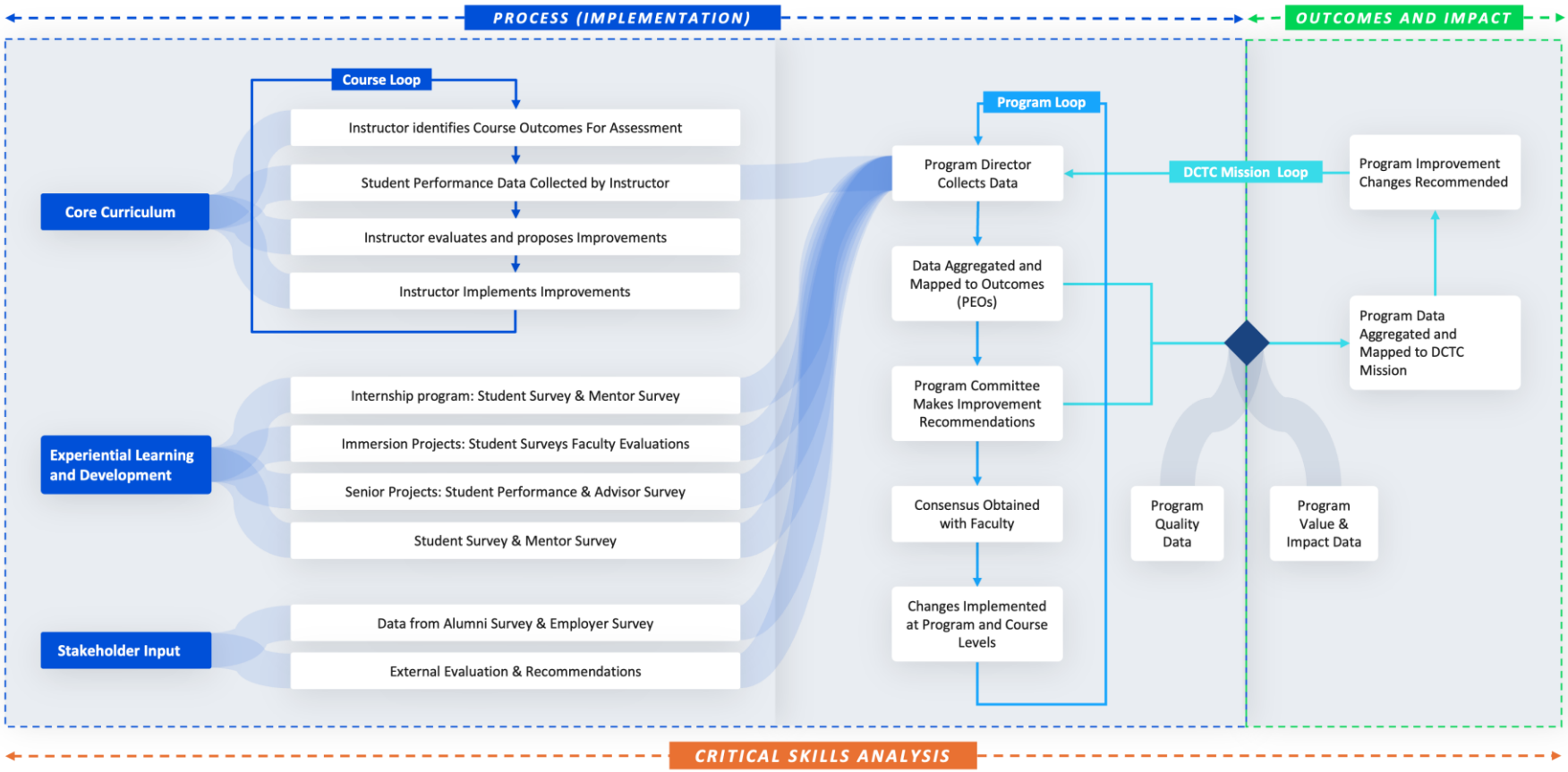

Figure 6. Assessment of critical skills drive ongoing improvement throughout DCTC

Data Sources and Metrics

Data is gathered through a combination of surveys, interviews, scholar deliverables, host organization feedback, stakeholder consultations, and internal dashboards. Categories of metrics include:

Category	Sample Metrics
Process	• Course evaluations and completion rates • Internship onboarding timelines and host feedback • Faculty preparedness and engagement • Communication reach and brand consistency • University performance on recruitment, retention, and compliance
Outcomes	• Stakeholder engagement and confidence in DCTC • Placement in mission-critical roles • Broader recognition and replication of DCTC model • Early career success of alumni
Impact	• Scholar value and impact in the workforce • Alumni engagement • Stakeholder engagement
Cost Effectiveness	• Cost per scholar • Comparative analysis with similar programs • Cost stability across years and cohorts

Table 1. DCTC Major Metrics Categories

Lessons Learned and Continuous Improvements

The DCTC prototype was intentionally structured to surface insights that could drive meaningful improvements, both within the program and across the broader DoD civilian talent ecosystem. Drawing on stakeholder feedback, faculty and scholar reflections, internship data, and site visits, we categorized key lessons and responses under the four primary evaluation dimensions used to assess DCTC performance: Implementation, Outcomes, Impact, and Cost Effectiveness.

1. Implementation (Process) – Improving Program Execution

Recruitment and Branding

- Lesson: Initial scholar recruitment cycles were affected by limited program visibility and unclear messaging. As a new program, it took time to establish recognizable branding and a consistent public presence.
- Action Taken: AIRC launched a multi-channel communications campaign, including an AIRC DCTC website (https://acqirc.org/dctc/), a LinkedIn presence, campus outreach, a scholar blog, and support for the stand-up of https://dctc.mil/ and university-specific DCTC websites. University partners were provided with a standardized brand guide to ensure alignment.
- Ongoing: Biannual updates to recruitment materials and campus implementation guidelines.

Faculty Preparation and Curriculum Delivery

- Lesson: With the launch of DCTC in April 2023, only a few months ahead of the Fall 2023 semester, the curriculum was developed concurrently with delivery. Early course delivery revealed gaps in faculty preparation, particularly where course content was still being developed.
- Action Taken: Full-semester materials are released in advance, and annual faculty workshops have been introduced. Faculty are now engaged in curriculum redesign to co-create improved content and ensure delivery readiness.
- Ongoing: Annual summer and spring faculty workshops. The summer workshop in July 2025; refined DCTC 301 and 401 courses were launched Fall 2025.

Internship Onboarding and Communication

- Lesson: Lack of clarity on scholar expectations, shifting timelines, and roles/responsibilities delayed onboarding and caused some confusion for scholars and DoD organizations.
- Action Taken: Initiated the internship selection and matching process earlier, onboarding sessions held and tailored to DoD host organizations and scholars, and includes a supplemental internship overview and welcome packet, and more consistent and timely communication implemented throughout the process.
- Ongoing: Continual evaluation of internships through site visits and post-internship surveys.

Program Orientation and Showcase

- Lesson: Cohorts entering into the program need a better idea of the mission, values, structure, and culture of the DoD and federal workforce.
- Action Taken: Orientation was separated into a dedicated virtual event (July 29–30, 2025) focused on DCTC expectations and DoD workforce culture, while the annual 2025 DCTC Scholar Showcase was redesigned as an impactful demonstration of select scholar-led projects.

2. Outcomes – Enhancing Scholar Readiness and Placement

Scholar Selection

- Lesson: University-led selection didn't always align with DoD mission needs; initial application materials lacked depth to assess candidate fit and mission alignment.
- Action Taken: AIRC centralized selection after the initial cohort and refined the process to align with DoD critical skill gaps and occupational series. All selections reviewed by DCTC Program Office within OUSD(A&S).
- Ongoing: Working on continual improvements, to include incorporating best practices from other programs and organizations, including video questions to mirror interviewing as utilized by the Air Force Palace Acquire Program (PAQ). Currently working with DoD organizations to integrate earlier in the process and support future selections.

Internship Fit and Project Alignment

- Lesson: Scholars expressed concern over project clarity, alignment with their interests, and limited choice in assignments.

- Action Taken: Expanded solicitation efforts by creating a dedicated DCTC Internship Landing Page (https://dctcinternships.acqirc.org), leveraging the annual PEO Summit, and a memorandum from the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment encouraging participation across the Department. The submission process for DoD partners has evolved from a static PDF form to a dynamic online intake form that feeds directly into the DCTC Hub, streamlining internal down-selection and enabling scholars to review and rank projects based on alignment with their skills, goals, and location preferences. Projects are now pre-vetted for mission relevance and clarity, and each cycle continues to expand our internal database of internship offerings and insights, thereby strengthening the program's institutional knowledge and driving continuous improvement efforts.

2024 → 25 GROWTH SNAPSHOT

	FY24	FY25	▲
DoD Internship Hosts	27	37	+36%
Scholars	85	98	+15%
Internship Project Proposals	86	115	+34%
Top 3 Internship Matches	91%	89%	Steady

Figure 7. 2024-25 growth snapshot

Mentorship and Development

- Lesson: Scholars' experiences with mentorship varied widely. For the first year of the program, the DoD Strategic Partners primarily provided mentorship during their internships. Many scholars sought clearer expectations and more structured career guidance.
- Action Taken: As part of the second internship solicitation and requirements, mentorship expectations for DoD host organizations were clearly defined. Additionally, the AIRC team added a DCTC Mentor to the team who provides strengths coaching, resume prep, and facilitates scholar leader roles from program start through their service obligation.

Course Design and Delivery

The DCTC four-course sequence (DCTC 301, 302, 401, and 402) remains a cornerstone of the scholar experience, representing the second largest time investment after the project-based internships. The curriculum underwent significant revisions based on feedback from scholars, faculty, and DoD stakeholders.

- Lesson: Active learning components (e.g., in-class activity in 301) were practical but not always well integrated. Scholars responded positively when activities were tied to real-world defense contexts.
- Action Taken: Key activities were updated and restructured to align with learning objectives and DoD skill needs. Curriculum is now mapped against the five critical skill clusters, outlined in Figure 3.
- Ongoing: Active learning is now an intentional design element across all four courses.
- Lesson: Senior project courses (DCTC 401/402) suffered from limited continuity and perceived disconnect from the DoD mission.
- Action Taken: Redesigned DCTC 401/402 into a year-long sequence that builds from select project-based internships. Practitioners from DoD Strategic Partners are being engaged to support project development and mentoring.
- Ongoing: The AIRC team is coordinating with summer internship hosts to identify suitable real-world projects. Scholar teams will be matched to resulting real-world projects in Fall 2025, enabling deeper, mission-connected engagement throughout the academic year.

This continual evaluation and adjustments reflect DCTC's commitment to delivering meaningful, mission-aligned learning. The curriculum is not only academic—it is experiential, preparing scholars for the complexity and collaboration required in civilian defense careers from Day One.

3. Impact – Driving Long-Term Workforce Value

Career Identity and Connection to Mission

- Lesson: Scholars benefit most when they can see their role within the broader DoD mission.
- Action Taken: Exposure to potential DoD roles and occupations will be incorporated from the onset. Starting with the orientation and continuing through DCTC mentoring, coursework has been adjusted to emphasize civilian service narratives, agency overviews, and exposure to strategic DoD challenges.

Alumni and Scholar Engagement

- Lesson: Scholars expressed strong interest in peer learning, alumni connections, and cross-cohort collaboration.
- Action Taken: Monthly scholar leadership calls, faculty feedback loops, and student-led blog platforms have been introduced to strengthen engagement and voice across the program.

Engaging with DoD Collaborative Entities

- Lesson: Early engagement with innovation organizations enhances curriculum and exposure.
- Action Taken: Building on prior engagements, DCTC is increasing efforts to align with established innovation pathways. This includes adapting systems engineering and design thinking elements from SERC faculty with lean startup methodology into a full academic year, leveraging projects sponsored by DoD strategic partners. This project-based approach to learning enables more sustained scholar engagement, deeper alignment with mission-driven DoD problems, and enhanced opportunities for interaction with civilian sponsors and end users.

4. Cost Effectiveness – Refining Program Model and Sustainability

Scholar Award Package

- Lesson: The original award model provided generous support and modeled a subset of DoD scholarship-for-service programs, covering full tuition and fees plus a $2,000 monthly stipend over the 22-month award period. However, this model introduced considerable complexity and administrative burden. Tuition and fee structures varied widely across institutions, degree types, and residency statuses, resulting in unpredictable costs per scholar. The variability complicated financial forecasting and introduced a perverse incentive to favor lower-cost institutions or in-state tuition, potentially undermining DCTC's merit-based approach and long-term goal of cultivating top-tier civilian talent.
- Action Taken: Beginning with Cohort '27, the third cohort, DCTC transitioned to a fixed-cost award model. This shift reduced the total cost of the award package by approximately 50%, creating a more manageable and transparent budgeting framework. While the overall amount is lower, the revised model remains competitive with industry offers and other DoD scholarship and hiring programs. The fixed-cost structure simplifies administration and ensures equitable, predictable costs across the scholar population, while preserving flexibility in how students use their funds (excluding internship travel support).
- Ongoing: The award package is continually evaluated to ensure it supports program goals. Importantly, DCTC's objective is not to reimburse each scholar's exact college costs. Instead, it is to offer a consistent, competitive award that supports access, incentivizes commitment, and enhances readiness for civilian service in the DoD.

Operational Efficiency

- Lesson: Manual processes and fragmented data collection created inefficiencies and limited analysis.
- Action Taken: AIRC is leveraging commercial off-the-shelf products for a centralized data collection tool and exploring the long-term viability of supporting modeling and simulation for policy evaluation and operational planning.

As a direct result of these lessons and stakeholder feedback, DCTC has evolved significantly across its three cohorts. The following table outlines key differences in program elements across Cohorts ’25 through ’27, reflecting how design, delivery, and operational support have matured to better align with statutory intent, scholar needs, and DoD expectations.

DCTC Pilot Cohorts Comparison at a Glance

CATEGORY	COHORT '25	COHORT '26	COHORT '27
Scholarship Period	Aug 2023-May 2025	Aug 2024-May 2026	Aug 2025-May 2027
Program Role	Program Prototype/ Proof of Concept/ Lessons Learned	Refined pilot w/ addition of service obligation	Expanding reach; setting stage for regional model
Scholar Selection	Pilot Universities	AIRC + OUSD(A&S) Final	AIRC + OUSD(A&S) Final
Cohort Size	83	93	61* **Potential to add scholars with additional universities*
Major Distribution	Broad; *further alignment to DoD acquisition roles required*	Targeted DoD Critical Needs	Built on Cohort '26 strategy with DCTC internship preference insights
Scholar Selection Timeline	May-June 2023	Jan-May 2024	Sep-Dec 2024
Curriculum Status	Developed & Piloted Real-Time	Refined using scholar, university & DoD feedback	Refined and increased mission-driven senior projects w/ DoD sponsorship
Internship Matching	Nov 2023-Mar 2024	Sep 2024 - Feb 2025	Oct 2025 - Mar 2026
Placement Strategy	No service obligation, building DoD awareness via internships & DCTC Scholar Hub	1:1 Service Obligation, earlier start & solidifying formal relationships with DoD organizations	Build on Cohort '26 strategy
Key Lesson	Successful prototype; exposed gaps now addressed in future cohorts & program design	Earlier engagement, clearer matching, foundation for strengthening placement	Improving timing; exploring scalable solutions with regional models

Table 2. DCTC Cohort Comparison at a Glance

University Participation Criteria

The selection and onboarding of university partners has been a foundational component of the DCTC design and execution. The process has evolved significantly, beginning with an AIRC-led, centralized, data-informed selection of four initial universities and transitioning to a DoD partner-nominated model that enables sustainable, demand-driven expansion. This section outlines the criteria and rationale for each phase.

Initial Universities: A Data-Driven Approach

The initial four universities—North Carolina A&T, Purdue University, The University of Arizona, and Virginia Tech—were selected through a structured, data-informed process aligned with the statutorily-established goals for DCTC. The DCTC team utilized publicly available datasets, academic and defense-focused classifications, and institutional attributes to identify strong candidate institutions.

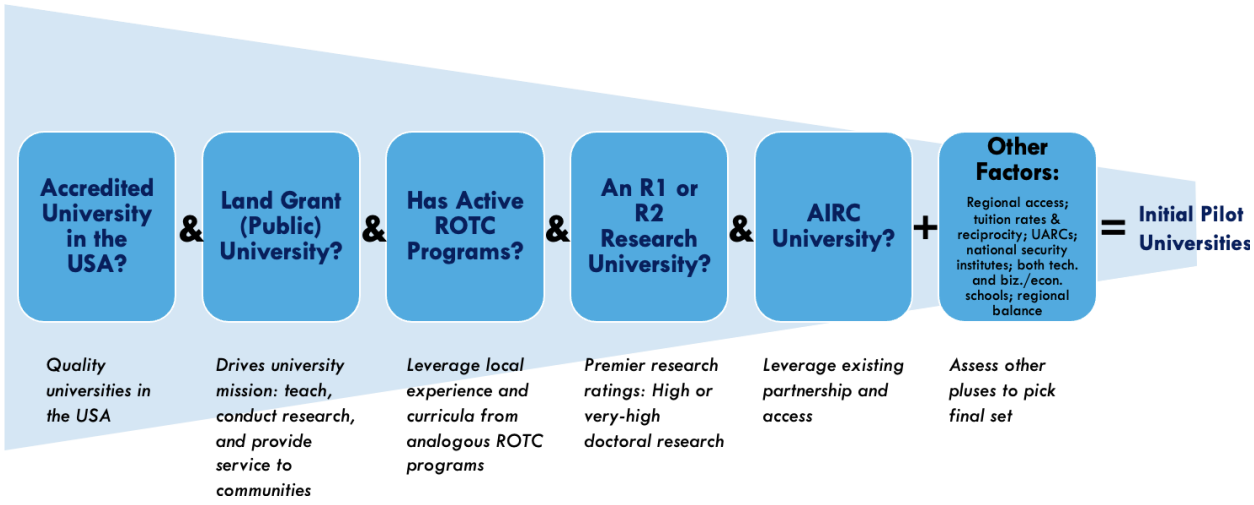

Figure 8. Selection criteria for initial DCTC universities

Final selections were made based on alignment with the following criteria:

Core Selection Criteria

- Accreditation: U.S.-based, fully accredited institutions to ensure baseline educational quality.
    - Emphasis on ABET-accredited programs (STEM disciplines) and AACSB-accredited programs (business, finance, and management).
- Land Grant Status: Institutions with public land-grant designation (under the Morrill Act of 1862) reflect a mission of service and applied learning.
    - Public University: Ensures alignment with national service and affordability missions.

- Active ROTC Program: Institutions with established ROTC programs demonstrated experience with military-affiliated student populations, complementary leadership development, and capacity for student support systems.
- R1 or R2 Research Classification: Carnegie-classified research universities with high (R2) or very high (R1) research activity indicated institutional capability, cross-disciplinary offerings, and potential for national security-relevant faculty partnerships.
- Multidisciplinary Breadth: Presence of both technical (engineering, data science) and business-oriented programs (finance, acquisition, policy) to support DCTC's holistic curriculum.

Strategic and Operational Factors

- AIRC Network Membership: Prior collaboration and shared infrastructure to enable early-stage coordination and feedback.

Figure 9. AIRC network universities

- Proximity to DoD Installations: Universities located within an accessible distance to key military installations supported site visits, guest speakers, and immersive learning opportunities.
- Regional Balance and Outreach: Geographical distribution across U.S. regions, consideration of tuition reciprocity agreements for out-of-state scholars, and access to unique regional or national security programs.
- Cost Reasonableness: Consideration of tuition rates and administrative burden to manage awards with consistent efficiency across institutions.

This rigorous framework allowed DCTC to identify high-potential universities capable of launching quickly while providing a range of perspectives, institutional readiness, and alignment with DoD needs.

Expansion Universities: DoD-Nominated, Demand-Driven Growth

Building on lessons learned during the initial prototype, the DCTC program has adopted a more sustainable model for university expansion. Rather than centrally selecting additional universities, the program now relies on nominations by DoD Strategic Partners who commit to co-investing in the success of new scholar cohorts.

Key Improvements in the Expansion Model

- Strategic Alignment: Universities are proposed by DoD organizations that have hiring needs, internship hosting capacity, and a long-term interest in developing talent pipelines. This ensures scholar development is directly connected to placement outcomes.
- Shared Ownership and Accountability: The new model reinforces co-investment. DoD Strategic Partners commit to supporting the full lifecycle of scholar engagement, including recruitment, internship support, mentoring, and job placement.
- Simplified University Lifecycle Management: Similar to the model used by H4D, universities are naturally retained or phased out based on performance and sustained sponsor engagement. Institutions that no longer yield mission-aligned talent will naturally exit the program.
- Cost Stabilization: By focusing on fixed-cost awards and reducing variability in tuition and administrative expenses, the expansion model avoids previous challenges of wide cost fluctuation between majors and institutions. This eliminates the unintended incentive to prioritize lower-cost schools over higher-performing or strategically aligned ones.
- Program Sustainability: This partner-nominated model, combined with the fixed scholar award, lays the foundation for a cost-share approach in future phases, distributing the financial burden and reducing sole reliance on central funding.

Ongoing Evaluation of Universities

The original universities will be reviewed for continued participation based on their alignment with the DoD-partner model. Those with strong relationships with existing or emerging DoD strategic partners may remain active in the DCTC network, while others may transition out. The emphasis will shift from centralized oversight to performance-based engagement, ensuring DCTC's long-term effectiveness and flexibility.

The DCTC university engagement strategy evolved from centrally curated to decentralized, performance-based, and partnership-driven to ensure the program remains grounded in real DoD workforce needs, reduces cost volatility, and creates a scalable path forward. Through this two-phase approach, DCTC balances rigorous academic preparation with mission-driven, employment-aligned outcomes.

Student Eligibility and Selection Criteria

Eligibility Criteria

To be eligible for the DCTC program, applicants must meet all of the following requirements at the time of application:

- Citizenship: Be a U.S. citizen
- GPA: Have and maintain a minimum cumulative GPA of 3.0 on a 4.0 scale
- Degree Program: Be enrolled full-time in an in-person bachelor's or joint bachelor's/master's degree program at one of the four participating universities:
    - North Carolina A&T State University
    - Purdue University
    - The University of Arizona
    - Virginia Tech
- Graduation Timeline: Have four semesters remaining before graduation and submit an academic plan signed by a faculty advisor
- Security Clearance: Be eligible for a security clearance and willing to undergo a background check
- Commitments:
    - Register for four DCTC courses (two credits each) across the final two years
    - Complete an eight-week, project-based internship during the summer between the academic years, typically the summer before senior year
    - Attend the DCTC Orientation and Scholar Showcase prior to program start
    - Accept a two-year post-graduation civilian service obligation with the DoD within the acquisition mission
    - Not be simultaneously committed to another federal scholarship/internship program (e.g., ROTC, SMART)

The scholar application has improved from year to year, taking into account lessons learned. The following represents the most recent application for Cohort '27, recruited and selected in Fall/Winter 2024. Cohort '27 applicants were required to submit:

- A current resume (PDF)
- Unofficial transcript (PDF)
- Signed course plan of study (PDF)
- Responses to prompts for three short essays (350-word limit each):
    - How would joining DoD as a civilian contributing to the defense acquisition mission further your professional goals and public service interests?

- How do your work and academic experiences demonstrate your character and professional development?
- Is there anything else we should know about you?

Evolution of the Student Selection Process

The DCTC student selection process has undergone three major iterations to enhance talent recruiting, consistency, and alignment with the DoD's workforce needs.

Cohort	Selection Model	Notable Features
'25	University-led	No service obligation; application variations across schools
'26	Centralized by AIRC w/ OUSD(A&S) final review	Introduced standardized application and rubric and service obligation
'27	Centralized by AIRC w/ OUSD(A&S) final review	Streamlined application questions and emphasized selection criteria based on DoD critical occupations aligned to DoD acquisition roles

Table 3. Summary of DCTC Scholar Selection Process by Cohort

Each application was reviewed and scored independently by members of a five-person panel AIRC Review Team, with all data managed through the DCTC Hub. The individual scores were examined together to support the selection recommendation to OUSD(A&S).

Student Selection Process Improvements and Next Steps

What's Improved:

- Centralized scoring across all universities using a shared rubric
- Use of the DCTC Hub for application intake, scoring, and review tracking
- Enhanced coordination with DoD stakeholders on major/career field preferences
- Streamlined academic plan verification and eligibility review

What We Learned:

- University screening is valuable for eligibility verification, but not sufficient for holistic selection
- Incorporating improvements to the DCTC Hub to enable reviewer efficiency, including resume visibility and dashboard visualization tools
- Review by major and degree type (rather than school) provides better fidelity
- Direct engagement with DoD partners improved mission alignment

What's Ahead:

- Testing short video responses to assess communication skills at scale
- Introducing tiered review categories (Must Select, Discussion Required, Do Not Select) to guide DoD partner input
- Continued integration of DoD career field guidance into rubric refinement
- Ongoing evaluation of major distributions and placement outcomes to adjust future application priorities

As the DCTC student selection model has evolved, it reflects a deliberate balance between broadening access, aligning with mission-critical workforce needs, and ensuring consistent, merit-driven processes. Lessons learned from earlier cohorts have helped shape a more structured and data-informed approach, one that incorporates input from universities, central reviewers, and DoD partners. With selection tightly aligned to the program's developmental goals and service commitment, the financial assistance framework serves as a meaningful enabler, removing barriers to access for top-performing, mission-driven talent committed to public service.

Financial Assistance and Service Obligation

In alignment with 10 U.S. Code, DCTC has defined both:

- The criteria for a member of the program to receive financial assistance from the Department of Defense, and
- The term of service as a civilian employee of the Department of Defense required in return for that assistance.

Initial Design

The program originally launched with a comprehensive award model designed to attract top talent across multidisciplinary majors. Scholars received full tuition and fees, and a $2,000 monthly stipend for the 22-month award period. While this model supported early recruiting for the first two cohorts, it introduced substantial unpredictability in overall program costs. Tuition and fee structures vary widely across institutions and degree programs, making accurate forecasting difficult. The complexity of managing reimbursements at the scholar and institutional level also increased the administrative burden significantly.

As cost is a key program evaluation factor, student costs represent the largest program cost overall. Importantly, the variability risked creating perverse incentives, encouraging the selection of lower-cost institutions as DCTC participating universities or of candidates that are in-state rather than focusing on candidate quality and alignment with DoD mission needs. For a program designed to attract high-performing, mission-driven individuals into critical roles across the defense acquisition workforce, this tension undermined long-term sustainability.

Cohort ’27 and Beyond

Beginning with the third cohort, Cohort ’27, DCTC adopted a fixed-cost award model. This change simplifies budgeting, improves fiscal predictability, and ensures consistent support to scholars regardless of their university’s tuition rate. The revised award package took into account the national average for attendance at public universities. **It reduces the cost per scholar by approximately 50%** while remaining competitive with comparable federal scholarships and industry opportunities. It also preserves the flexibility for scholars to use funds in support of their academic success, excluding the internship support stipend.

AWARD ELEMENT	YEAR 1	YEAR 2	TOTAL	PURPOSE
Tuition (capped)	$12,000	$12,000	**$24,000**	Based on national average; not tied to specific university
Stipend	$12,000	$10,000	**$22,000**	Monthly support during the award period ($1K/month)
Books/Misc	$1,000	$1,000	**$2,000**	Annual allowance for tech and course materials
Internship Support Stipend	$10,000	$0	**$10,000**	8-week summer internship, year 1 only
TOTAL	**$35,000**	**$23,000**	**$58,000**	**Fixed, unburdened cost/scholar**

Figure 10. DCTC Scholar award package Cohort ’27 and beyond

Both iterations of the DCTC scholar award are tied directly to a two-year service obligation within the DoD. Each scholar commits to serving one year for every year of financial assistance received, thereby reinforcing the program’s return on investment.

The DCTC Program Team continues to evaluate the financial assistance model to ensure it supports access, maintains competitiveness, and meets the Department’s evolving workforce needs. Financial assistance is not positioned as the primary motivator for participation; it is an enabling factor that removes barriers for high-potential individuals who are committed to public service to support and contribute to the national security mission.

Employment Pathways

Initial Design

From its inception, DCTC was structured as an integrated scholarship-for-service program and a talent pipeline that provides exposure, development, and ultimately placement into the DoD civilian workforce within the acquisition mission. Unlike traditional scholarship models, DCTC is uniquely designed to facilitate both internship and post-graduation employment placement through structured matching processes within the program.

This design was intentional. Given the accelerated timeline to launch and the goal of developing mission-aligned talent, the program deferred final job placement decisions until scholars and DoD organizations had greater mutual exposure. This allowed for informed placement decisions based on demonstrated performance, evolving mission needs, and geographic considerations.

It is important to note that within this design, DCTC serves as a facilitator, not a recruiter. While the program works closely with DoD organizations to align scholars with roles that meet mission-critical needs, scholars maintain agency and responsibility in securing their final placement. The goal is to support each scholar in securing at least one job offer with the DoD. Scholars are expected to engage actively, apply to relevant roles, and track their application progress. If a scholar declines a suitable position without a viable alternative, they may be required to repay the scholarship in accordance with the terms of the service obligation.

Throughout the placement process, scholars are supported by a DCTC Mentor who assists with resumes, bios, and interview preparation. The program emphasizes scholar accountability and tracks job application progress to ensure scholars are actively pursuing placement. To support placement, DCTC currently operates across four primary pathways:

Pathway A: DCTC Internship Host (Preferred Path)
All scholars participate in a summer internship, matched through a centrally managed process that sources proposals from across the DoD. In 2025, over 100 internship opportunities were proposed and ~70 were down-selected in coordination with OUSD(A&S). Scholars ranked their top five preferences and were matched accordingly, with host organizations reviewing final resumes prior to confirmation. As a result, scholars were assigned to 48 internships.

The DCTC internship is positioned as an eight-week interview, i.e., the primary pathway to full-time DoD placement. Following the internship, both the scholar and the DoD host assess whether full-time employment is a mutually suitable fit. If not, alternative pathways are pursued.

Pathway B: Entry-Level Programs (e.g., NADP, AF PAQ, Army Fellows Program)
DCTC maintains relationships with major civilian entry-level programs across the services, including AF PAQ, Army Fellows, and Navy NADP. While scholars must still apply and be selected, DCTC's engagement with these programs enhances visibility and facilitates matches between DCTC scholars and mission needs. These partnerships help bridge opportunities while leveraging existing programs and infrastructure for hiring entry-level positions.

Pathway C: The DCTC Network
With over 46 DoD partner organizations, the DCTC network serves as a broad-based employment ecosystem in which scholars are connected with organizations aligned with their interests and skills. While applications remain scholar-led, DCTC introduces scholars to the steps toward federal employment and current DCTC scholars and program alumni express the importance of this support in navigating the federal hiring landscape. One such testimonial is provided in a recent profile of DCTC alumna Faith Jones, a member of Cohort 2025, and a new member of the cybersecurity team at the US Army Program Executive Office (PEO) Enterprise.

Pathway D: USAJobs
When other pathways are not viable, scholars are guided to pursue open positions via USAJobs. This route remains available but is less efficient due to the extended timeline for reviews and the inability to highlight the DCTC scholar difference.

Future Improvements

Building on lessons learned, the program is testing a partner-based model with Cohort ’27, in which DoD organizations are directly involved in university selection and scholar matching from the outset. Under this model, participating DoD organizations commit to:

- Nominating or selecting scholars aligned to their workforce needs
- Hosting project-based internships
- Hiring upon graduation, contingent on scholar performance

This approach mirrors other scholarship-for-service models and reduces uncertainty for both scholars and DoD hosts. Early feedback from prior cohorts indicates that both parties prefer greater transparency and predictability in the placement process. Scholars expressed concern over delayed job clarity, while DoD hosts faced limited visibility into future hiring commitments. This revised model offers a clearer path to civilian service and increases institutional buy-in.

By strengthening early alignment between DoD needs and DCTC scholar profiles, the program enhances placement outcomes and mitigates risk, reduces administrative burden, and builds toward a scalable, co-invested future model for civilian talent development.

Resources Required

Successful implementation of the DCTC Program requires sustained coordination and contributions from four core stakeholder groups: the AIRC, university teams, DoD organizations, and oversight from the OUSD(A&S).

Each plays a distinct and essential role in ensuring the program fulfills its statutory mission while evolving toward a more scalable and sustainable model.

AIRC: Program Management, Core Curriculum, and Continuous Improvement

AIRC serves as the central program manager for DCTC, responsible for day-to-day operations, strategic planning, and execution across all cohorts in tight coordination with OUSD(A&S). Key responsibilities include:

- Curriculum Development and Delivery: Designing and coordinating the DCTC core curriculum to align with DoD acquisition and workforce needs
- Program Management and Execution: Managing scholar application and selection processes, internship and job placement facilitation, scholar compliance tracking, and overall program administration
- Data Management and Analysis: Collecting, analyzing, and reporting data on scholar progress, placement outcomes, and program effectiveness
- Program Evaluation and Improvement: Leading continuous improvement efforts informed by stakeholder feedback and implementation lessons

- Stakeholder Coordination: Serving as the liaison between OUSD(A&S), university teams, and participating DoD organizations

All activities are conducted under the oversight of OUSD(A&S), ensuring alignment with congressional intent and broader acquisition workforce development priorities.

University Teams: Local Implementation and Campus Management

Each participating university plays a key role in supporting DCTC delivery at the local level. Responsibilities include:

- Hosting and Supporting DCTC Courses: Delivering the DCTC curriculum on campus in partnership with AIRC, including faculty facilitation and academic credit alignment
- Student Support: Advising scholars on academic planning, course registration, and compliance with DCTC requirements
- Campus Promotion: Raising awareness of DCTC across the university to attract strong candidates from a range of disciplines
- Initial Application Review: Supporting the screening of applicant eligibility and confirming academic readiness

These functions ensure DCTC is fully embedded within the academic environment and accessible to a wide range of high-performing students.

DoD Organizations: Strategic Alignment, Talent Selection, and Placement

The role of DoD organizations is expanding under the updated partner-based model. Moving forward, their responsibilities will include:

- University Nomination and Partnership: Recommending universities to participate in DCTC based on workforce needs, geographic reach, and mission alignment
- Scholar Selection and Engagement: Participating in the scholar selection process and engaging early with prospective talent, including serving as internship hosts
- Internship and Job Placement: Hosting project-based internships and committing to hire DCTC scholars upon graduation, contingent on performance
- Program Co-Investment: Supporting a shift toward a cost-shared model that reduces reliance on centralized funding and reinforces DoD ownership of workforce outcomes

This shift enables DoD organizations to play a more active and engaged role from the start of the scholar journey, increasing placement efficiency and reinforcing long-term program sustainability.

Implementation Milestones

Launch

DCTC officially launched in 2023, congressionally directed to address critical civilian workforce shortages within the DoD. The initial prototype, which includes the first three cohorts, focused on developing, testing, and refining core elements of the program, including university partnerships, curriculum delivery, internship matching, and DoD-aligned scholar selection.

Implementation Milestones

- **February 2023:** The AIRC *"DCTC Implementation Recommendations"* study provided foundational structural and operational guidance, including university selection criteria, curriculum scope, and collaborative engagement strategies.
- **March 2023:** AIRC selected four universities—North Carolina A&T, Purdue, The University of Arizona, and Virginia Tech—using a rubric-based evaluation of 25 institutions in its consortium.
- **April–May 2023:** Scholar recruiting launched with promotional materials and the dctc.mil website. The three-month application cycle yielded 365 applicants, from which 90 were selected and invited to participate in Cohort '25.
- **June–August 2023:** AIRC outlined the four-course DCTC curriculum and built program infrastructure and support tools, including the DCTC Hub.
- **August 2023:** The inaugural DCTC cohort, comprised of 85 scholars who accepted the invitation, began the program at four universities. The first course, *DCTC-301: Fundamentals of Civilian Service,* was delivered simultaneously across all four institutions.
- **September 2023:** DCTC hosted a formal virtual welcome event with remarks from USD(A&S), signifying formal recognition of the program's launch.
- **October–December 2023:** AIRC issued a call for DoD project-based internship proposals. From 86 applications, 10 DoD organizations were selected to host scholar teams to participate in 27 internship projects.
- **January–March 2024:** The second course, *DCTC-302: Exploration of the DoD Acquisition Environment*, launched, and Cohort '25 scholars were matched to their internships. The matching process incorporated scholar preferences and DoD reviews.
- **May–July 2024:** Eighty-five Cohort '25 scholars completed summer internships, most in multidisciplinary teams, culminating in the inaugural DCTC Scholar Showcase, which convened over 300 participants in Washington, D.C.
- **August–December 2024:** The second program year launched with Cohort '25 entering their third semester (*DCTC-401: Overview of DoD Missions and Community Functions*) and Cohort '26 beginning their first semester. Recruitment began for Cohort '27 and internship proposals for Summer 2025 were solicited.
- **December 2024–February 2025:** Cohort '27 selections were finalized, and scholars were presented with ~70 internship options, leading to 48 confirmed matches. The final semester of the curriculum, *DCTC-402: Using Systems Thinking and Problem Solving to Drive Institutions*. launched in January for scholars in Cohort '25.
- **May–August 2025:** The inaugural Cohort '25 graduated, having completed all four semesters of the DCTC curriculum. Cohort '26 scholars began Summer 2025 internships,

continuing the program's emphasis on experiential learning tied directly to career placement.
- **August 2025:** Third year began with Cohort ’26 in their third semester and Cohort ’27 starting their first.

These milestones reflect an intensive, accelerated implementation effort driven by the statutory urgency to stand up DCTC. The experience, data, and lessons from the first two years of DCTC directly informed improvements in later cohorts and shaped the design of a scalable, partner-led model for the future.

Expansion

AIRC has moved to expand DCTC’s impact by increasing cohort size and developing internal infrastructure to support program growth. By 2024, over 250 scholars had been onboarded across Cohorts ’25, ’26, and ’27.

Expansion Progress:

- **Applications increased significantly**, from 365 in the first cycle to nearly 500 by Cohort ’27, aided by refined messaging, enhanced outreach, and a centralized application platform.
- **Program awareness broadened**, with over 46 DoD organizations expressing interest in internships or placement.
- **Application and selection processes matured**, including the development of a centralized application review platform, the use of structured scoring rubrics, and the integration of DoD partner input.

Barriers Encountered:

- **Hiring Freeze (2024–2025):** A federal hiring freeze introduced significant uncertainty for scholar placement, leading to additional reliance on alternate hiring pathways including leveraging the defense industrial base.
- **Budget Constraints:** DoD budget reductions required adjustments to planning for future cohorts, particularly impacting the planned expansion to 20 institutions and 400 scholars by August 2023.

Despite these challenges, the program continued to strengthen relationships with DoD stakeholders, developed a shared hiring dashboard to track scholar placement progress, and maintained high levels of scholar engagement and satisfaction.

Adjustments Toward Full Implementation

Recognizing that full implementation would require operational sustainability and stakeholder alignment, DCTC initiated a strategic reset in 2024 to refine its business model, update its selection approach, and prepare for long-term scale.

The FY2020 NDAA directed the program to reach up to 20 institutions and 400 scholars by August 2023. While the program achieved significant progress in scholar onboarding and infrastructure, full scale-up has been delayed due to hiring freezes, funding uncertainty, and lessons from early implementation.

Adjustments Made:

- Shift to Partner-Based Model: Under the updated model, DoD organizations nominate universities and play a direct role in selecting and supporting scholars, internships, and job placements. This reduces the administrative burden on AIRC and participating universities while aligning scholar development more closely to workforce needs.
- Award Structure Revisions: The financial assistance package was adjusted to a fixed-cost model that remains competitive with other federal programs, while helping to ensure sustainability.
- Scholar Placement Improvements: Enhanced tracking systems, deeper relationships with entry-level programs (e.g., NADP, AF PAQ, Army Fellows), and new DCTC Hub features have strengthened employment support.

Path Forward:

DCTC remains committed to scaling responsibly while preserving program quality. The program has demonstrated strong scholar demand, high institutional interest, and clear need within the DoD workforce. Moving forward, the program aims to:

- Continue the partner-based model with Cohort ’27 and refine the framework based on results
- Identify strategic partners ready to co-invest in scholar development and employment
- Provide a roadmap to incrementally grow the number of supported institutions as program funding and DoD demand allow

DCTC is evolving from a centrally managed model into a distributed, DoD-aligned model informed by real-world implementation. These changes have positioned the program to meet its long-term objectives in a scalable and mission-driven manner.

Strategic Outcomes and Program Impact

DCTC was established, and codified at 10 U.S.C. § 2200g–j, to test a new approach to attracting and preparing top-tier students for civilian careers in the DoD that support the acquisition mission. Now entering its third year, DCTC has demonstrated measurable contributions to civilian workforce readiness, alignment with evolving mission needs, and integration with

broader acquisition workforce development strategies. The program's structure, emphasizing applied learning, cross-disciplinary teaming, and early exposure to the DoD ecosystem, has enabled it to serve as both a pipeline and proving ground for the next generation of national security talent.

Contribution to Civilian Workforce Readiness

DCTC was designed to holistically develop students into job-ready professionals who can contribute meaningfully to the DoD mission on Day One of civilian service. Through a curriculum that integrates technical, organizational, and human-centered skills, the program cultivates the five core skill clusters identified as essential for defense readiness: The DoD System, Digital & Data, Individual, Team, and Complex Problem Solving.

Key outcomes to date:

- **Preparedness for Mission-Driven Roles:** All DCTC Cohort '25 and '26 scholars completed multidisciplinary, project-based internships with DoD organizations, with Cohort '27 preparing to be matched for Summer 2026. Early evaluations show that these scholars demonstrated high levels of initiative, collaboration, and problem-solving in real-world mission contexts. The multidisciplinary team approach prevalent in the DCTC coursework is designed to take such mission-minded students and accelerate the development of skills previously thought to only be built on the job, while they are still in college.
- **Developmental Rigor:** Scholars complete a four-semester curriculum tailored to the realities of DoD service. The structure supports long-term academic integration, reflection, and continuous exposure to acquisition environments.
- **Civilian Career Awareness:** Scholars reported increased confidence in understanding their role in the defense mission, with many identifying a stronger sense of purpose and commitment to national service through civilian pathways.
- **Placement Outcomes:** Despite external challenges such as hiring freezes, a large majority of Cohort '25 scholars, who did not have a service obligation, joined the DoD ecosystem through DoD contractors or continued education with expressed interest in pursuing DoD careers, demonstrating the program's ability to position scholars for impact within the national security mission.

Alignment with Talent Needs of Emerging Technology Sectors

As the DoD modernizes to meet new threats and leverage advanced technologies, its civilian workforce must evolve accordingly. DCTC was built with this future in mind: from course content to project-based internships, the program emphasizes critical thinking, agility, and mission application in emerging domains such as AI/ML, software-defined systems, supply chain resilience, and digital acquisition.

Highlights include:

- **Technology-Aware Curriculum:** The DCTC curriculum exposes scholars to topics such as modular open systems architecture (MOSA), digital engineering, AI/ML, and software acquisition, preparing them to operate in tech-intensive acquisition environments.
- **Interdisciplinary Talent Pool:** The program intentionally draws scholars from both STEM and non-STEM disciplines, fostering the kind of interdisciplinary teaming required in modern defense acquisition programs.
- **Applied Experience in Technology-Driven Projects:** Internships hosted by organizations have enabled scholars to contribute to national security challenges in areas such as data analytics, autonomy, and secure software development.
- **Adaptive Model:** The program's flexibility, particularly the opportunity to refine internship and placement alignment each year, has ensured a close fit between scholar skillsets and emerging workforce needs.

Integration with Acquisition Workforce Development Strategies

DCTC fills a unique space in the DoD's acquisition workforce pipeline. While traditional entry-level hiring programs such as NADP, AF PAQ, and Army Fellows remain essential, DCTC complements these efforts by front-loading development, increasing readiness, and reducing time-to-impact post-hire.

Key areas of integration:

- **Pipeline Connectivity:** DCTC actively coordinates with entry-level programs to ensure alignment, candidate visibility, and priority hiring consideration, creating a seamless pathway from undergraduate study to DoD employment.
- **Curriculum Embedded in Acquisition Contexts:** All four courses in the DCTC sequence are mapped to competencies and real-world functions relevant to the acquisition lifecycle, ensuring scholars gain practical and contextual knowledge prior to employment.
- **Workforce Data Contribution:** Through its centralized application system, performance tracking, and post-placement follow-up, DCTC contributes valuable data and insights to inform DoD workforce planning and talent management.
- **Scalable, Partner-led Design:** The updated partner model tested with Cohort '27 strengthens integration by giving DoD organizations greater agency in selecting universities, matching candidates, and planning for intern-to-employee conversion.

DCTC has demonstrated that a thoughtfully designed scholarship-for-service model, rooted in collaboration between academia and strategic DoD implementation partners, can enhance civilian workforce readiness, align talent with emerging mission needs, and integrate with existing acquisition and development strategies. These outcomes meet statutory objectives and lay the groundwork for long-term program evolution and broader adoption across the Department.

The results are clear: DCTC works. It reaches students while they are in university, prepares them for DoD service, accelerates their readiness, and places them in positions that directly

address our most critical defense workforce gaps. It bridges the classroom and the mission, while delivering value to the taxpayer by producing cleared, skilled, and committed employees, ready on Day One.

DCTC has validated the core model for a durable, institutionalized component of the DoD talent strategy. Deliberate expansion requires greater investment to retain and grow generations of mission-driven talent to private industry that offers clearer pathways and sustained investment.

Challenges, Lessons Learned, and Opportunities

The DCTC program was intentionally designed as a learning prototype, one that would adapt based on implementation experience, stakeholder feedback, and evolving workforce needs. From the earliest stages of Cohort ’25 through the expansion of Cohorts ’26 and ’27, the program has

maintained a continuous feedback loop across all levels: scholars, university partners, DoD internship hosts, and internal program teams.

Major Lessons Learned

Key insights were drawn from recurring feedback across the scholar lifecycle, including program onboarding, course delivery, internships, and the scholar showcase. These findings point to systemic issues, not isolated incidents:

- **Role Clarity**: Lack of clear delineation among the responsibilities of AIRC, universities, and DoD partners created confusion. Scholars did not always know where to go for support, and university staff were unsure of their scope.
- **Communication Gaps**: Timing and consistency of program communications were inconsistent early on. Scholars and stakeholders reported difficulty tracking deadlines and expectations.
- **Fragmented Data Collection**: Initially decentralized by universities, feedback collection proved inconsistent and difficult to aggregate. Once centralized under AIRC, data quality and response rates improved dramatically.
- **Faculty and Curriculum Support**: Courses in the first academic year were built while being taught, leaving faculty underprepared and scholars confused. Improved scaffolding, materials, and faculty engagement have since been introduced.
- **Internship Expectations and Transitions**: Scholars struggled to understand the internships' link to post-graduation employment. The absence of a clear career path created uncertainty.

Central Improvements Implemented

The program responded to these challenges with tangible improvements:

- Created standard operating procedures for scholar onboarding, academic plans, and application review.
- Introduced faculty workshops and curriculum templates to align teaching with learning objectives.
- Tested mentor and scholar leader initiatives to enhance direct scholar engagement.
- Consolidated feedback processes.
- Leveraged a DCTC Scholar Showcase to highlight success stories.

These actions led to demonstrable improvements in program delivery, scholar experience, and DoD strategic partner confidence.

Persistent Challenge: Funding and Scalability

While implementation challenges were expected and largely addressed, the most acute and unresolved issue remains funding stability**.** The original vision of scaling to 20 institutions and 400 scholars by August 2023 has been delayed due to significant decreases in DCTC funding.

Although the program has bipartisan support and is aligned with statutory objectives under 10 U.S.C. § 2200g–j, annual appropriations have not kept pace with the program's trajectory. For FY2026, the Department submitted a significantly reduced budget for DCTC, one that enables support for current cohorts but does not allow for expansion or the recruitment of a Cohort '28.

This funding constraint has forced the program to pause new recruitment and concentrate on ensuring Cohorts '25 through '27 are supported through their completion. It has also created significant uncertainty for scholars, university partners, and DoD stakeholders who were preparing for continued growth.

Opportunities and Path Forward

Despite funding challenges, the program has proven that the DCTC model is viable, responsive, and uniquely positioned to address urgent talent gaps in the civilian defense workforce. Key opportunities include:

- **Transitioning to a partner-driven model** where DoD organizations nominate universities and manage local recruiting and scholar development.
- **Formalizing DCTC as a standing program** within the DoD acquisition workforce pipeline, backed by stable, multi-year funding.
- **Leveraging lessons learned** to build a lighter, scalable model that maintains developmental quality while reducing administrative burden.

DCTC has moved from a concept to a validated talent solution. **The path ahead is clear, but it is only achievable with the necessary investment and sustained support.** Without changes to the current funding trajectory, the program will be unable to scale or fulfill its congressional mandate and legislative authority.

In short, the DCTC model is working. The scholars are ready. The DoD organizations are ready. What is needed now is the resolve to fund and scale what works.

Conclusions

The DCTC program has achieved what Congress envisioned: a program that identifies, recruits, and develops mission-driven students who are prepared to make meaningful contributions to the DoD immediately upon graduation. Over just two years, DCTC has evolved from concept to execution, successfully delivering a four-course developmental curriculum, placing scholars in real-world project-based internships, and aligning graduates with civilian service opportunities across the DoD.

The program has demonstrated measurable progress against every key indicator of success: scholar satisfaction, DoD partner engagement, curriculum quality, internship outcomes, and readiness for civilian employment. It has also shown agility, iterating its model based on lessons learned and transitioning toward a more scalable, DoD-partner-driven design.

DCTC is working, and critically, the program is working at the right time. The national security environment is becoming increasingly complex, and the Department requires a civilian workforce that can keep pace. The scholars graduating from DCTC are mission-focused, cleared, and already trained on the DoD acquisition ecosystem.

The question before us is no longer whether the model works. It does. The real question is: **Will we invest in what works, and do so at the scale our mission demands?**

Acknowledgements

DCTC continues to thrive because of an extraordinary coalition across government, academia, and the broader defense ecosystem. This report, and the progress it represents, is the result of a shared commitment to developing the next generation of civilian national security leaders.

We are especially grateful to Mr. Mark Krzysko, whose early vision and leadership as the program's inaugural Executive Director helped establish DCTC as a bold and necessary initiative within the Department of Defense. His foundational efforts ensured DCTC launched with the urgency, credibility, and cross-sector support needed to succeed. While now retired, Mr. Krzysko's imprint on this program remains enduring and deeply appreciated.

We also thank Mr. Garry Shafovaloff, who continues to lead the program as DCTC Director. His day-to-day dedication, tireless coordination, and clear-eyed focus have guided the program through each phase, from concept to curriculum to career pathways. His work has ensured that DCTC remains responsive, scholar-focused, and execution-driven.

We are indebted to the leadership of OUSD(A&S), particularly Mr. John Tenaglia, Mr. David Cadman, Ms. Mary Kathryn Robinson, Mr. Gary Ashworth, and others who have provided critical guidance and support. Their belief in DCTC as a national investment in talent has enabled the program to launch, evolve, and scale with purpose.

The AIRC DCTC team serves as the operational backbone of the program, leading curriculum development, scholar support, strategic DoD partnerships, data collection, communications, and continuous improvement. Their efforts ensure that DCTC remains a learning organization, responsive to feedback and focused on impact.

We thank the DCTC scholars, especially Cohort '25, who joined a new and ambitious program with optimism and dedication. Their feedback, persistence, and leadership have directly shaped the program's success.

Our university partners, North Carolina A&T, Purdue, The University of Arizona, and Virginia Tech, have been instrumental in implementing DCTC on their campuses, supporting scholars, and helping translate the curriculum into meaningful academic and developmental experiences.

Finally, we extend appreciation to the 45+ DoD organizations that have supported the program through project-based internships, hiring engagement, and long-term partnership. Their commitment has provided scholars with a realistic, high-impact view of DoD civilian careers.

Together, this network has built not just a program, but a model for how we identify, develop, and deploy the next generation of mission-driven civilian talent.

Research Team

DCTC strengthens the Department's capacity to deliver capability with speed, rigor, and mission focus by developing a skilled, empowered civilian workforce ready to drive acquisition transformation and sustain the nation's industrial and innovation advantage. Likewise, it is the people of the DCTC program team that executed the strategy and realized the goals of the program. Team members represent a range of experience and expertise that collectively supported the research and development of the DCTC program, its instrumentation, and its prototyping. The knowledge the team gained will contribute to the continued development and refinement of the program, and the team structure and make-up serves as a model for replication.

Following the proceeding listing of DCTC research team members are brief bios for each.

Name	Organization	Labor Category
Dinesh Verma	Stevens Institute of Technology	Principal Investigator (PI)
Philip Antón	Stevens Institute of Technology	Co-PI
Kara Pepe	Stevens Institute of Technology	Co-PI
Victoria Cuff	Stevens Institute of Technology	Co-Pi
Andrea Dame	Stevens Institute of Technology	DCTC Senior Program Manager
George Korfiatis	Stevens Institute of Technology	DCTC Education Advisor
John Willison	Stevens Institute of Technology	DCTC Strategic Partnership Lead
Karen Thornton	Stevens Institute of Technology	DCTC Education Lead
Nancy Kreidler	Stevens Institute of Technology	DCTC Mentor
Cassidy Cheshire	Stevens Institute of Technology	DCTC Program Coordinator
Payuna Uday	Stevens Institute of Technology	Support Research Staff
Rosalind Dale	North Carolina A&T	University PI, Lead Point of Contact
Dan DeLaurentis	Purdue University	University PI
Ken Callahan	Purdue University	Lead, Point of Contact
Larry Head	The University of Arizona	University PI, Lead Point of Contact
Laura Freeman	Virginia Tech	University PI, Lead Point of Contact

Dinesh Verma, Stevens, Principal Investigator (PI): Verma is the Executive Director of the Systems Engineering Research Center (SERC). Almost two decades after he and others blended a bold vision to establish SERC, Dr. Verma retains his enthusiasm for expanding systems engineering, ensuring acquisition innovation, and providing DoD sponsors with viable, practical, and implementable solutions resulting from applied research.

Philip Antón, Stevens, Co-PI: Dr. Antón serves as chief scientist of SERC's Acquisition Innovation Research Center (AIRC), where he assesses the practical needs of the DoD, helps to envision and develop innovative acquisition research, and ensures the transition and application of AIRC results in DoD acquisition policies, guidance, practices, reports, and workforce development.

Kara Pepe, Stevens, Co-PI: Pepe is Director of Operations for the SERC. Although SERC researchers and staff are spread across the country, Ms. Pepe keeps everyone connected by guiding operations for research, contracting, reporting, accounting, communications, events and more, as well as acting as a liaison with SERC partners in government, industry, and academia.

Victoria Cuff, Stevens, DCTC Senior Program Director: Cuff is an AIRC Research Fellow supporting the Office of the Secretary of Defense with research associated with the PPBE Commission, workforce initiatives, and overall improvement of the Department's acquisition management policies and practices. Cuff brings an informed perspective and awareness of the larger defense ecosystem, plus experience in workforce development, particularly developing initiatives to upskill and reskill various workforces to match a changing technological landscape.

Andrea Dame, Stevens, DCTC Senior Program Manager: Dame brings knowledge of and experience in learning and development, coaching, and mentoring, and creating transformative learning experiences.

George Korfiatis, Stevens, DCTC Education Advisor: Korfiatis is currently the McLean Chair Professor of Environmental Engineering at the Department of Civil, Environmental and Ocean Engineering, Stevens Institute of Technology. He brings knowledge of and high-level experience in managing departments and units to achieve enterprise-level missions and collaborating to establish policies and lead implementation of strategic initiatives.

John Willison, Stevens, DCTC Strategic Partnership Lead: Willison retired in 2022 after 36 years as an Army civilian, the last 11 years among the Senior Executive Service. He brings leadership experience in areas spanning research and development, acquisition, and sustainment and vast knowledge of strategic planning, innovation and reform, and talent management.

Karen Thornton, Stevens, DCTC Education Lead: Thornton is a director on the Procurement Round Table and teaches at The George Washington University Law School. She brings knowledge of procurement and national defense initiatives and experience in cross-field collaboration.

Nancy Kreidler, Stevens, DCTC Mentor: Kreidler retired in 2022 after 25 years as an Army civilian, the last three years among the Senior Executive Service. She brings leadership experience in cybersecurity, information technology, and workforce development.

Cassidy Cheshire, Stevens, DCTC Program Coordinator: Cheshire brings experience in project management and program development. She has designed learning experiences across online, hybrid, and in-person settings, led national event planning, and built train-the-trainer models that equip individuals to deliver content effectively across varying modalities.

Payuna Uday, Stevens, Support Research Staff: Uday is a Research Scientist within the Systems Engineering Research Center (SERC). She brings knowledge of resilience in large-scale complex systems and research experience focused on systems engineering and policy.

Rosalind Dale, North Carolina A&T, University PI, Lead Point of Contact: Dale brings over 27 years of experience, including leadership roles at NC A&T and Illinois Extension. Since joining NC A&T in 2011, she has served as associate dean and Extension administrator, spearheading strategic initiatives to enhance organizational impact, funding, and brand awareness. Her career is marked by a commitment to serving limited-resource communities through developmental programs.

Dan DeLaurentis, Purdue, University PI: DeLaurentis is the Bruce Reese Professor of Aeronautics and Astronautics and former SERC Chief Scientist. He brings leadership experience in large-scale research projects and a commitment to leveraging the synergies between DCTC and other security- and defense-focused programs at Purdue to help expand the program and support national security initiatives.

Ken Callahan, Purdue, Lead, Point of Contact: Callahan is the former commander of Purdue's Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps. He brings knowledge of organizational leadership and experience in mentoring scholars, developing their teamwork and leadership skills, educating them on the DoD, and helping them appreciate the unique DoD culture and core values.

Larry Head, The University of Arizona, University PI & Lead Point of Contact: Head is a Professor of Systems and Industrial Engineering at The University of Arizona. He brings extensive academic and industry leadership experience and knowledge in areas including systems engineering and engineering management.

Laura Freeman, Virginia Tech, University PI, Lead Point of Contact, and Curriculum Lead: Freeman is a Research Associate Professor of Statistics and the Director of the Intelligent Systems Lab at the Virginia Tech Hume Center. She brings research experience focused on cyber-physical systems, data science, artificial intelligence (AI), and machine learning to address challenges in national security. She develops test and evaluation methods focused on emerging system technology and advises and counsels the workforce in using such methods and systems.

Acronyms and Abbreviations

AIRC	Acquisition Innovation Research Center
ASD(A)	Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Acquisition
CDAO	Chief Digital and Artificial Intelligence Office
CSA	Cyber Service Academy
DPCAP	Defense Pricing, Contracting, and Acquisition Policy
DCTC	Defense Civilian Training Corps
DIU	Defense Innovation Unit
DoD	Department of Defense
FY	Fiscal Year
H4D	Hacking for Defense
JES	Joint Explanatory Statement
OUSD(A&S)	Office of the Under Secretary of Defense Acquisition and Sustainment
PAQ	Palace Acquire Program
NDAA	National Defense Authorization Act
NLP	Natural Language Processing
NSIN	National Security Innovation Network
ROTC	Reserve Officers' Training Corps
SASC	Senate Armed Services Committee
SERC	Systems Engineering Research Center
SMART	Science, Mathematics, and Research for Transformation
USD(R&E)	Under Secretary of Defense for Research and Engineering
UARC	University-Affiliated Research Center

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Appendix A. 10 U.S.C. Chapter 113

Chapter 113—DEFENSE CIVILIAN TRAINING CORPS

Sec.
2200g. Establishment
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2200i. Model Authorities
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§2200g. Establishment
(a) In General.—The Secretary of Defense, acting through the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment, shall establish and maintain a Defense Civilian Training Corps program, organized into one or more units, at any accredited civilian educational institution authorized to grant baccalaureate degrees.

(b) Purpose.—The purpose of the Defense Civilian Training Corps is to target critical skills gaps necessary to achieve the objectives of the national defense strategies required by section 113(g) of this title and the national security strategies required by section 108 of the National Security Act of 1947 (50 U.S.C. 3043) by preparing students selected for the Defense Civilian Training Corps for Department of Defense careers relating to acquisition, digital technologies, critical technologies, science, engineering, finance, and other civilian occupations determined by the Secretary of Defense.

(c) Use of Resources and Programs.—The Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment may leverage the resources and programs of the acquisition research organization within a civilian college or university that is described under section 4142(a) of this title (commonly referred to as the "Acquisition Innovation Research Center") to carry out the requirements of this chapter.

§2200h. Program Elements
In establishing the program, the Secretary of Defense shall determine the following:

(1) A methodology to identify and target critical skills gaps in Department of Defense occupations relating to acquisition, science, engineering, or other civilian occupations determined by the Secretary of Defense.

(2) A mechanism to track and report the success of the program in eliminating any critical skills gaps identified under paragraph (1).

(3) Criteria for an accredited civilian educational institution to participate in the program.

(4) The eligibility of a student to become a member of the program.

(5) Criteria required for a member of the program to receive financial assistance from the Department of Defense.

(6) The term of service as an employee of the Department of Defense required for a member of the program to receive such financial assistance.

(7) Criteria required for a member of the program to be released from a term of service.

(8) The method by which a successful graduate of the program may gain immediate employment in the Department of Defense.

(9) Resources required for implementation of the program.

§2200i. Model Authorities
In making determinations under section 2200h of this title, the Secretary of Defense shall use the authorities under chapters 103 and 111 of this title as guides.

§2200j. Definitions
In this chapter:

(1) The term "program" means the Defense Civilian Training Corps program established under section 2200g.

(2) The term "member of the program" means a student at an accredited civilian educational institution who is enrolled in the program.

Appendix B. FY2020 NDAA Sec. 860

SEC. 860. ESTABLISHMENT OF DEFENSE CIVILIAN TRAINING CORPS.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Part III of subtitle A of title 10, United States Code, is amended by inserting after chapter 112 the following new chapter:

‘‘CHAPTER 113—DEFENSE CIVILIAN TRAINING CORPS

“Sec. 2200g. Establishment.
‘‘Sec. 2200h. Program elements.
‘‘Sec. 2200i. Model authorities.
‘‘Sec. 2200j. Definitions.

‘‘SEC. 2200g. ESTABLISHMENT.
‘‘For the purposes of preparing selected students for public service in Department of Defense occupations relating to acquisition, science, engineering, or other civilian occupations determined by the Secretary of Defense, and to target critical skill gaps in the Department of Defense, the Secretary of Defense shall establish and maintain a Defense Civilian Training Corps program, organized into one or more units, at any accredited civilian educational institution authorized to grant baccalaureate degrees.

‘‘Sec. 2200h. PROGRAM ELEMENTS.
‘‘In establishing the program, the Secretary of Defense shall determine the following:

‘‘(1) A methodology to identify and target critical skills gaps in Department of Defense occupations relating to acquisition, science, engineering, or other civilian occupations determined by the Secretary of Defense.
‘‘(2) A mechanism to track and report the success of the program in eliminating any critical skills gaps identified under paragraph (1).
‘‘(3) Criteria for an accredited civilian educational institution to participate in the program.
‘‘(4) The eligibility of a student to become a member of the program.
‘‘(5) Criteria required for a member of the program to receive financial assistance from the Department of Defense.
‘‘(6) The term of service as an employee of the Department of Defense required for a member of the program to receive such financial assistance.
‘‘(7) Criteria required for a member of the program to be released from a term of service.
‘‘(8) The method by which a successful graduate of the program may gain immediate employment in the Department of Defense.
‘‘(9) Resources required for implementation of the program.

“SEC. 2200i. MODEL AUTHORITIES.
‘‘In making determinations under section 2200h of this title, the Secretary of Defense shall use the authorities under chapters 103 and 111 of this title as guides.

‘‘SEC. 2200j. DEFINITIONS.
‘‘In this chapter:

‘‘(1) The term ‘program’ means the Defense Civilian Training Corps program established under section 2200g.
‘‘(2) The term ‘member of the program’ means a student at an accredited civilian educational institution who is enrolled in the program.’’.

(b) IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE.—
(1) INITIAL IMPLEMENTATION.—Not later than February 15, 2020, the Secretary of Defense shall submit to the congressional defense committees a plan and schedule to implement the Defense Civilian Training Corps program established under chapter 113 of title 10, United States Code (as added by subsection (a)) at one accredited civilian educational institution authorized to grant baccalaureate degrees not later than August 1, 2021. The plan shall include a list of critical skills gaps the program will address and recommendations for any legislative changes required for effective implementation of the program.
(2) EXPANSION.—Not later than December 31, 2020, the Secretary of Defense shall submit to the congressional defense committees an expansion plan and schedule to expand the Defense Civilian Training Corps program to five accredited civilian educational institutions not later than August 1, 2022.
(3) FULL IMPLEMENTATION.—Not later than December 31, 2021, the Secretary of Defense shall submit to the congressional defense committees a full implementation plan and schedule to expand the Defense Civilian Training Corps program to at least 20 accredited civilian educational institutions with not fewer than 400 members enrolled in the program not later than August 1, 2023.

Appendix C. FY2023 NDAA Sec. 833

SEC. 833. MODIFICATIONS TO DEFENSE CIVILIAN TRAINING CORPS

Section 2200g of title 10, United States Code, is amended—

(1) by striking ‘‘For the purposes of’’ and all that follows through ‘‘establish and maintain’’ and inserting the following: ‘‘The Secretary of Defense, acting through the Under Secretary for Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment, shall establish and maintain’’;
(2) by designating the text of such section, as amended by paragraph (1), as subsection (a); and
(3) by adding at the end the following new subsections:

‘‘(b) PURPOSE.—The purpose of the Defense Civilian Training Corps is to target critical skills gaps necessary to achieve the objectives of each national defense strategy required by section 113(g) of this title and each national security strategy required by section 108 of the National Security Act of 1947 (50 U.S.C. 3043) by preparing students selected for the Defense Civilian Training Corps for Department of Defense careers relating to acquisition, digital technologies, critical technologies, science, engineering, finance, and other civilian occupations determined by the Secretary of Defense.

“(c) USE OF RESOURCES AND PROGRAMS.—Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment shall use the resources and programs of the acquisition research organization within a civilian college or university that is described under section 4142(a) of this title (commonly referred to as the ‘Acquisition Innovation Research Center’) to carry out the requirements of this chapter.

“(d) CONSULTATION.—In planning and implementing the Defense Civilian Training Corps program, the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment shall consult with the following:

‘‘(1) The Under Secretary of Defense for Research and Engineering, including the Director of the Defense Innovation Unit and the Strategic Engagements Director of the National Security Innovation Network.
‘‘(2) The Chief Digital and Artificial Intelligence Officer (as established by the memorandum of the Deputy Secretary of Defense titled ‘Establishment of the Chief Digital and Artificial Intelligence Officer’ issued on December 8, 2021).
‘‘(3) The Chief Information Officer of the Department of Defense.
‘‘(4) The Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness.
‘‘(5) The Secretaries of the military departments.
‘‘(6) The Superintendents of the Service Academies (as defined in section 347 of this title).
‘‘(7) The Commanding General, U.S. Army Cadet Command.
‘‘(8) The Commander, Jeanne M. Holm Center for Officer Accessions and Citizen Development.
‘‘(9) The Commander, Naval Service Training Command.’’.

Appendix D. Contractual Requirements

Under research topic WRT-1098,

Task I— DCTC Piloting and Instrumentation. Based on inaugural pilot year lessons learned and considering the defense acquisition ecosystem as a complex system, apply a systems engineering approach to refine and revise a structure for the DCTC Program that can be instrumented and piloted in calendar year 2024 and 2025 and leads to analysis of pilot activities which can inform DoD's ultimate approach for the DCTC program at scale. Research should draw upon activities conducted during COHORT 0, feedback from initial cadre of students, and research conducted during first two semesters in the pilot phase to assess integrated program design, curriculum, as well as timing of events, impact of topics and experiences. Research must address what works well and what does not. This will require:

(a) evaluation and refinement of the initial set of universities where the DCTC program and units are established and piloted;

(b) development of a program to select and mentor faculty, developing opportunities for them to engage with the DoD mission elements;

(c) recommendations to the program management approach and staffing to support the research and development of the DCTC program, its instrumentation and piloting, and its prototyping;

(d) refinement of an approach to support the government's program for university outreach and management, scholar outreach and management, strategic communications;

(e) prototype and pilot a student pipeline management and evaluation process from recruiting and support to placement and follow-up, and a scholar mentoring and position management process; and

(f) establish an evaluation approach to assess the success of the DCTC program using metrics reportable to sponsors and Congress as well as recommendations by March 2025 for program expansion or optimization.

Task II— DCTC Curriculum. Refine initial curriculum that is responsive to the intent of the DCTC program and reflective of inaugural semester feedback. The structure can be part of the DCTC piloting effort but should account for the multitude of functions and critical skills the DoD is likely to need, pilot a "functional track" approach to benefit select functional areas (e.g., Operational Test and Evaluation) and should leverage analogous DoD programs already in existence like the Reserve Officer Training Corps programs of each military service.

Task III— Interactive Student Enrichment. Assess and refine an Interactive Student enrichment approach to include engagement opportunities across individual universities to foster unity of the cohort, engage undergraduate students in STEM majors and develop plans to go beyond other disciplines of interest to the DoD (e.g., Data Analytics, Procurement and Contracting, and Business), support student development through practical real solution projects, internships, and leadership development.

Task IV— Internship Matching Process and Pathways to Employment. Assess and manage the approach to cultivation, matching, and placement process for student and DoD internship opportunities to establish a viable pathway-to-employment process. Efforts should include key success elements for the student enrichment approach (e.g., security clearance establishment processes and timelines) as well as timing of key milestones and processes for success of the two-year program.

Task V— DCTC Scaling and Long-Term Planning. Provide options for program deployment and expansion to scale to inform DoDs long-term plan for DCTC execution. Options could explore university willingness or ability to develop DCTC programs or tracks with less minimal DoD investment, expansion to skilled technical workforce, regional or functional franchise models with DCTC CORE curriculum and other key tenets provided centrally.

Appendix E. Selected Research and Studies

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Appendix H. Conference Presentations

NCMA WORLD CONGRESS – July 21-24, 2024 Seattle

Integrating Gaming in Talent Development: The Defense Civilian Training Corps Approach

Speakers: Tory Cuff & Karen Thornton, AIRC
Marsha Berry & Dan Kolenich, Army Game Studio, Huntsville
Dalia Castro, Belle Higginbotham & Aliyah Terry, DCTC Scholars

Join us for an enlightening journey into the Defense Civilian Training Corps (DCTC) initiative, a pioneering approach to recruitment and training for the next generation of ready-to-innovate acquisition professionals. This session will provide details about the two-year program, current DoD partner organizations, and the approach for integrating classroom education with games, interactive exercises, and resilience training complemented by out-of-class immersive experiences and summer internships. Discover how this program is equipping students from diverse majors with comprehensive acquisition knowledge through a multidisciplinary, cohort-based approach. Participants will get to play and provide feedback on the latest version of the interactive DCTC Acquisition Game and hear from students interning at the Army Gaming Studio as they work to translate the board game version into a more dynamic video game for expanded use across DoD. Audience members from DoD organizations will learn how to become a DCTC strategic partner.

ETI-NDIA: EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES CONFERENCE– August 28-29, 2025, Washington, DC

Building Capacity to Produce Talent Needed to Win

Speakers: Karen Thornton & John Willison

The federal workforce is undergoing a shock to the system. And yet, the need for ready talent is enduring. Hiring fluctuations present a challenge that parallels the defense industrial base's effort to keep production lines hot to ensure readiness and resilience. These fluctuations also present an opportunity to build and sustain the capacity to produce talent with the skills employers need when they need them. Just as investing in the industrial base is vital for national security, so is ensuring a steady state of workforce production capacity.

Many affirm the importance of a capable workforce, and workforce-related initiatives abound. Yet the ability to build an adaptive and enduring talent base through true transformation remains elusive. A factory network developed through shared investment yields benefits beyond a

specific organization and can produce portable skills that enable a smooth flow of talent between the Defense Department and industry partners based on needs and priorities. The agile talent factory is a weapon of deterrence to maintain advantage in great power competition. The work to scale to a network of factories must be done before crisis is at our doorstep.

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