Writing Faculty Papers for Joint Professional Military Education

By Thomas P. Galvin

I n joint professional military education (JPME), there is no tool more powerful than the written word. Whether in the form of books, journal articles, opinion pieces, or course papers, students and faculty members demand high levels of intellectual rigor and reflection in both the products they read and the ones they produce. Scholarly writing requires precision in terminology and recognition of the limits and boundaries of one's arguments. When done well, written works make indelible and permanent contributions to our professional domain of knowledge.

One form of scholarly writing, faculty papers used as readings, plays an important role in JPME settings. The breadth of subjects that must be covered to satisfy the JPME requirements limits the ability to delve deeply into any one topic. Lesson material must be presented both effectively and efficiently. Sometimes this means that the best off-the-shelf readings (for example, journal articles, books, or book chapters) either are too long or detailed to be used, or else they present only a single side or perspective of a complex

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issue. Faculty papers are useful tools to present synthesized literature reviews or illustrative examples that help bring disparate literature to life. In the assessment of the JPME faculty, these papers draw out the most relevant and practical aspects of an issue, which encourages dialogue among students.

It has been my experience that some JPME faculty, especially new faculty members, are less likely to engage in this kind of writing and more prone to rely on off-the-shelf readings even though the articles may not mesh well with the published lesson objectives. Although competing demands for time and comparative inexperience in academia are contributing factors to this phenomenon,[1] my purpose here is to address a factor that has received less attention. Just as the *Joint Force Quarterly* submissions page stresses that writing for publication is very different from preparing course papers,[2] developing high-quality lesson materials represents a wholly different form of scholarly writing. However, there is no how-to guide or blueprint available to help new JPME faculty members get past the hardest step—that is, getting started at converting one's expertise and interests into a faculty paper that others can use for teaching in seminar.

I posit that there are principles that explain why some faculty papers are used, revised, and reused year after year and why others are not. In this article, I offer three such principles that emerge from the more successful papers: theoretical grounding, bridging theory to practice, and proper use of illustrative examples. New faculty may find these principles helpful in organizing ideas, while seasoned faculty may find them useful for coaching and mentoring their professional colleagues.

Theoretical Grounding

Theoretical grounding is the process of using theory from appropriate disciplines (and from military or nonmilitary domains) to present the underlying ideas behind doctrine, processes, and so forth. This principle stems from the need to separate education from training. One common mistake made when writing lesson materials is to treat doctrine as though it were theory. Doctrine is an important result of theory but is not theory in itself. The educational value comes in understanding the dialogue and decisions that led to the doctrine, as it is the choices presented that future doctrine writers will face. The same can be said for regulations, processes, systems, tactics, techniques, and procedures that are often included in JPME courses. Theory provides a framework for getting past the *what* and to the *why*.

As many JPME lessons are focused on practice, the purpose of theoretical grounding is not necessarily to teach theory but rather to broaden practice and encourage dialogue on potential improvements or innovations. A review of a number of successful U.S. Army War College papers indicates that theoretical grounding can be accomplished in five ways.

By Explaining Complex Phenomena. The author chooses a key component or concept of a theory, uses it to explain a current phenomenon (such as a global situation or existing process), and then shows how it can be applied more generally. For example, the authors of a faculty paper on organizational culture chose components of several theories to explain dominant elements of U.S. Army culture.[3] Theoretical grounding demonstrated to students that the phenomenon of culture has been studied and is reasonably well understood, and accordingly it can be used to explain how the U.S. Army's culture formed and why it may be difficult to change. This explanation then leads to student dialogue on what influence leaders have over the Service culture.

By Presenting Tensions and Choices. The author chooses a theory that offers opportunities for students to make choices and see how those choices play out. Social science is replete with 2-by-2 matrices representing the interaction of two factors. An author armed with such a construct could use it to present the current state of doctrine, processes, systems, and so forth and to present options regarding how things could be different, enabling robust student dialogue on the implications.

As an example, the aforementioned organizational culture paper presents Kim Cameron and Robert Quinn's competing values model to illustrate how the U.S. Army's scores on various organizational performance indicators illustrate not only its overall adherence to internal orientation and bureaucratic control but also its preferences for norms and values paradoxical to it. This helps engage students in dialogue on potential clashes of culture within the Army.[4]

By Elevating Students to Another Level. Some JPME, such as that provided by the war colleges, serves to bring students from one level of leadership to another (for example, from operational to strategic). Theory can serve as the basis for educating students on the similarities and differences. Lesson materials grounded in theory can help students break out of the familiar and embrace the new environment. An exemplar of such materials is the *Strategic Leadership Primer*, which comprises several faculty-written chapters, all well grounded in theory, that present the different tasks, competencies, and skills required of strategic leaders.[5] Some of the material is familiar to war college students who have already spent years as operational leaders, but the primer highlights how they may need to adapt their extant skills and competencies to the strategic environment they will enter after graduation.

By Distinguishing What Is Understood from What Is Not Well Understood. Theories do not explain everything; they have limitations and boundaries, and sometimes they conflict. The gaps can often be leveraged to discuss potential assumptions and biases held by students, catalyzing seminar dialogue. For example, one faculty paper on vision concludes by noting, "It should be clear that there is no 'cookie cutter' solution or best template for creating and implementing a vision."[6] This single sentence, which acknowledges the limits of what is known and understood *theoretically* about vision, offers students an opportunity to enter into rich and rewarding dialogue on what constitutes a "good enough" expression of vision using the concepts within the paper as a basis.

Student discussion in National War College seminar (NDU/Katherine Lewis)

By Clarifying Terms. Words have meaning, and too often they have multiple meanings, particularly in academia. Theoretical grounding includes the precise use of terms and levels of analysis. Good faculty papers help students navigate the meanings and uses, which is a useful skill to carry forward into practice. Two examples from the U.S. Army War College are short faculty papers on terms and principles concerning negotiation practices[7] and an overview of senior military officers' involvement in the Federal budgetary process.[8]

Bridging Theory to Practice

Sometimes finding the right fit between lesson objectives and readings is difficult, and this is particularly true regarding readings prepared by practitioners—opinion pieces and editorials, doctrine, regulations, government documents and reports, and studies by think tanks. JPME educators have to strike a balance between the requirements of the lesson,

the availability of appropriate off-the-shelf readings, and the preparatory needs of the students (for example, reasonable reading load, sufficient time for reflection, and preparing for oral presentations when assigned). Sometimes the best answer is to develop a faculty paper that synthesizes the available material and encourages students to read further.

Building a strong bridge between theory and practice is critical because adult learners must be able to see the practical value of the theory being grounded. There should be clear signposts that the tensions and choices, gaps in knowledge and understanding, and so on present themselves in the source literature. The following three methods describe ways that faculty papers build this bridge.

By Addressing Practical Application to the Military Context. When theories are developed in nonmilitary contexts (such as management theories from business schools or macroeconomics),

students may not fully appreciate their applicability to the military. Some may question the relevance, highlighting that the military is not like any other organization. While perhaps true, the similarities and differences between the military and other large complex organizations often influence how new ideas from society and business are introduced into the military and vice versa. Such ideas may not always be practical, but JPME should arm the students with well-reasoned arguments as to why not.

By Addressing "Hot" Topics. The cycle of publication in academic journals cannot always keep up with what is going on in the field.[9] The months (or years) between an author's final draft and publication are inadequate for satisfying the JPME requirement for presenting fresh and relevant educational materials. Faculty papers are well suited to address topics of current and heated debate and are easier to update with the latest information.

By Navigating and Filtering Difficult Theory. A clear indicator that a lesson is unsuccessful is when the students collectively demonstrate, through blank stares and dialogue that goes nowhere, that they did not "get it." Unquestionably, some theories (or the academic papers presenting them) are inherently difficult to read and understand. The translation of difficult concepts into plain language for practitioner use can often be best satisfied through a well-written faculty paper. Numerous past and current U.S. Army War College faculty papers, for example, serve this purpose. However, caution must be exercised to prevent concepts from being "dumbed down" or the introduction into the faculty paper of assumptions and biases disguised as part of the underpinning theory.

Proper Use of Illustrative Examples

Case studies, historical vignettes, and current events are popular ways of bringing theory and practice to life. They move the students from the abstract to the concrete, placing them in the shoes of military leaders facing difficult decisions related to the subject of the day. However, to be effective as educational tools, these examples have to reinforce the matters of theory and practice in the lesson. Off-the-shelf materials, such as published business cases or articles, may not always suffice. Best fit with the lesson is crucial.

Faculty papers that present such illustrative examples can either encompass the theory and practice or present only the example and refer back to theory and practice relayed in other readings. But coming up with the right examples is not easy, and sometimes the popular choice is not the best one for supporting the learning objectives. The most suitable readings are those that accomplish the following three tasks.

Illustrate Only Relevant Theory and Practice. Sometimes it is too easy to rely on a comprehensive off-the-shelf case study when a shorter, more targeted case is needed. Comprehensive cases can present digressions and distractions that pull students away from the subject. Exhibits

and questions for dialogue should be drawn from the relevant theories and matters of practice, and the teacher's guide should provide instructions to faculty to help keep the dialogue focused appropriately.

Remain Consistent at the Right Level of Analysis. If the theory in question explains an organizational phenomenon (for example, culture), then the practice and examples should be written at the organizational level of analysis. If the theory regards an individual phenomenon (such as leadership), then the rest should be written at the individual level of analysis. If a subject involves multiple levels, the case must clearly navigate among them to avoid confusion.

Choose Either a Good Common Case or an Important Exception. Authors may choose a case based on their familiarity with it, which can sometimes be a mistake. Many JPME faculty members teaching the case may not be familiar with it and may suspect that a different case would be a better one to use. As the author chooses a case and prepares the teaching note, it may be useful to consider the following questions:

- Is this a good, suitable example that clearly illustrates the principles or tensions in the theory and matters of practice, such that the students can better achieve the lesson objectives?

- Is this a useful outlier of practical application that helps students better understand the breadth of issues explained by the theory?

Choosing a case applicable to the second question is tricky and occurs comparatively rarely given limited seminar time, but sometimes a contrasting example that exposes the limitations of theory and practice can be a powerful educational tool.

JPME faculty members enjoy a unique opportunity to quickly and markedly contribute to both student learning and the military's professional domain of expert knowledge through the production of quality faculty papers. Presenting ideas that stimulate dialogue and critical reflection is the goal. Also, student feedback helps faculty authors develop those

ideas for pursuing publication. While there is no scientific formula or blueprint that guarantees a faculty paper will be reused for many years, the concepts of theoretical grounding, bridging theory to practice, and use of illustrative examples may help make their production more fruitful and generate useful contributions to both the JPME setting and the broader joint professional community. **JFQ**

Notes

[1] Joan Johnson-Freese, "The Reform of Military Education: Twenty-Five Years Later," *Orbis* 56, no. 1 (2012), 135–153.

[2] National Defense University Press, "JFQ Submission Guidelines and Writing Tips," available at <ndupress.ndu.edu/Home/SubmissionGuidelines.aspx>.

[3] Stephen J. Gerras, Leonard Wong, and Charles D. Allen, "Organizational Culture: Applying a Hybrid Model to the U.S. Army," U.S. Army War College faculty paper, 2008.

[4] Ibid., 3.

[5] Stephen J. Gerras, ed., *Strategic Leadership Primer*, 3rd ed. (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, 2010).

[6] Charles D. Allen and Andrew A. Hill, "Vision," U.S. Army War College faculty paper, 2012.

[7] George J. Woods, "Some Terminology and Definitions Used in 'Negotiating' Circles," U.S. Army War College faculty paper, 2007.

[8] Harold W. Lord, "Authorization or Appropriation," U.S. Army War College faculty paper, 2011.

[9] Jean M. Bartunek, "Academic-Practitioner Collaboration Need Not Require Joint or Relevant Research: Toward a Relational Scholarship of Integration," *Academy of Management Journal* 50, no. 6 (2007), 1323–1333.