

The 5th AOG Minority Outreach Conference 1-4 April 2004

SUMMARY

The 5th AOG Minority Outreach Conference was well organized and offered quality sessions that proved to be rewarding for attendees, the Association of Graduates, and the US Military Academy. The conference began on Thursday evening with a reception and lecture and continued on Friday with a USMA Leader Team update, a diversity seminar and panel discussion, and formal lunch and dinner activities. On Saturday, we heard from six cadet club leaders, had lunch in the Cadet Mess, and enjoyed an afternoon of professional development panel discussions. The conference concluded with a tour of selected new facilities and a networking party on Saturday, and the Community Gospel Service on Sunday. The 2004 conference was sponsored by Booz Allen Hamilton, whose principals and other organizational members contributed to activities throughout the conference.

Conference attendees included approximately 45 friends and alumni who traveled from across the country, 15 USMA staff and faculty members, 12 invited guests and their travel parties, 15 senior USMA leaders, 10 AOG members, 6 sponsoring organization representatives, and 45 cadets.

THURSDAY RECEPTION AND LECTURE

A substantial number of conference attendees arrived in time for the opening “ice-breaker” reception at Herbert Hall, home of the Association of Graduates. Following the reception, we joined the Plebe Class for the fifth presentation of the West Point Lecture Series on Diversity in General Roscoe Robinson, Jr., Auditorium. Our speaker was Lenora Billings-Harris, CSP, from Greensboro, North Carolina. Lenora speaks on the subject of diversity throughout the United States and in many foreign countries. Like the Plebes, Minority Outreach Conference attendees thoroughly enjoyed Lenora’s presentation on the value of diversity based on Wizard of Oz characters. She actually brought life-size replicas of each character for display on the stage. Many of us participated in the reception that followed the lecture. More information on Lenora Billings-Harris is available at <http://www.lenoraspeaks.com/index.html>.

The West Point Lecture Series on Diversity was founded in 2000 as part of the General Roscoe Robinson, Jr., Memorial. The lecture series is sponsored by Xerox, whose intent is to bring to West Point diversity-related experiences that the institution would otherwise not have access to. The first lecture took place during the April 2000 Minority Outreach Conference when General Johnnie Wilson spoke on Thursday evening prior to the dedication of Robinson Auditorium on Friday. Other lecturers include Deborah Tannen, Morris Dees, and Charles Moskos.

FRIDAY MORNING USMA UPDATE

Following conference opening remarks by Bill Perry (Minority Outreach Committee Chairperson), John Calabro (Committee Secretary) read a letter from Mr. Tom Dyer, who was unable to participate in the conference. The USMA Leader Team included LTG Bill Lennox (Superintendent), Mr. Rick Greenspan (Director of Intercollegiate Athletics), COL Barney Forsythe (Vice-Dean, representing BG Dan Kaufman, Dean), and LTC Mike Garrett (Acting Brigade Tactical Officer, representing BG Leo Brooks, Commandant). The Military Academy is doing well in all areas. **The Superintendent asked for alumni assistance in recruiting ethnic minorities at all levels. This includes new cadets, where we have seen a significant decline in African-American interest over the last two years. LTG Lennox also would appreciate any effort to sell the Military Academy to ethnic minorities who may become junior officer staff & faculty members, civilian faculty members, or government employee staff members.**

FRIDAY LUNCH

We were fortunate to have General Larry Ellis, Commander, US Army Forces Command, as our luncheon speaker. We were also joined by Mr. Reginald Brown, LTG Julius Becton, LTG Bill Lennox, several academic department heads, and eight members of the Cadet Brigade Staff. After an overview of key organizational and training issues at the Army and FORSCOM levels, General Ellis delivered a powerful message about caring for people, a leadership principle he has been known for throughout his extensive career. General Ellis is the senior African-American officer on active duty.

FRIDAY AFTERNOON DIVERSITY PROGRAM

Colonel Bob Johnson and his admissions team began the afternoon session with an update on minority admissions. Although the USMA is making good progress in most areas, African-American interest in West Point has declined slightly over the past few years. We expect the recent Supreme Court decision on the University of Michigan Law School Case to elevate our challenges to yet a higher level. **It is critical that our graduates and friends help by having any potential ethnic minority candidates for the Class of 2009 call the Directorate of Admissions at 845-938-4041 or visit the Admissions Office web site at <http://www.usma.edu/admissions/>. Our alumni and friends can also help out by encouraging elementary, middle, and secondary school students to better prepare themselves for life after high school, including college.** Although the competition is greater, the size of the pool of candidates eligible for West Point has changed very little in the past decade or so. West Point continues to be an unparalleled opportunity for young men and women, especially ethnic minorities.

Following the Admissions Update, COL Andre Sayles, Head of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science, offered a seminar on a novel approach to organizational diversity called Leading Diversity. The Leading Diversity Model represents organizational diversity as a process that answers most diversity-related questions and helps those who are intimidated by or

indifferent to diversity enter their comfort zone and move forward with a clear understanding of what cultural differences can mean to an organization and its leaders. The intent of the seminar was to both give attendees ideas to carry back to the workplace and establish a common ground for the distinguished panel discussion that was to follow.

The Distinguished Panel Discussion in Robinson Auditorium was an unprecedented event at West Point. The theme was *Diversity in Service to the Nation*. The panel members included LTG Julius Becton, who contributed to the military “friend of the court” brief that was cited repeatedly in the Supreme Court majority opinion on the University of Michigan Law School. Dr. Barbara Farmer and Dr. Edgar Farmer, co-authors of *Diversity in America-Visions of the Future*, joined us from the State College area of Pennsylvania. Edgar is on the faculty at Penn State, while Barbara is an elementary school principal. Ms. Angela Messer represented Booz Allen Hamilton, an organization that maintains national leadership in valuing diversity. BG Rhett Hernandez, Director, Army Officer Personnel Management Directorate, brought a powerful perspective from both his own experiences and from his subordinates in the personnel business. Finally, COL Rob Gordon, USMA Department of Social Sciences, represented the Military Academy, along with organizer and moderator, LTC Lester Knotts, Department of English. The panel offered tremendously insightful responses to many challenging questions from the audience, which was composed of conference participants as well as USMA staff and faculty. The diversity of the panel itself was particularly effective.

FRIDAY DINNER

The Minority Outreach Conference was proud to have the Honorable Reginald Brown as the keynote speaker at dinner on Friday. Mr. Brown is the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Manpower and Reserve Affairs. As always, he brought to the conference a message that all will long remember. Mr. Brown provided insights on global diversity that most of us have never thought about, since we normally focus on our own situation or our immediate organization. The context that he provided served as an excellent culmination of an afternoon of discussing diversity at many different levels from national to organizational. The simple reminder that diversity is a global issue that directly affects Americans served as an inspiration for continuing to expect concrete solutions within organizations that we have control over. We were fortunate to have LTG Lennox, several other USMA leaders, and the Cadet Gospel Choir in attendance. During the meal, MG Ron Johnson arrived from Kennedy Airport after a long journey from Iraq.

SATURDAY MORNING

On Saturday morning we focused on giving back to our beloved institution, specifically supporting ethnic minority cadet programs and activities. We all remember the importance of these activities to our success as cadets and our ultimate ability to meet the requirements for graduation. The cadet clubs that we know so well have no guaranteed funding support beyond what was available when each of us was a cadet—no matter when that happened to be. One of the best ways to support USMA as an institution and keep West Point visible in external minority communities is to support these young folks who are at the starting line and ready to go as soon

as the fuel comes in. Saturday morning was a real treat. The Commandant graciously released several cadets from that famous SAMI inspection to participate in the conference by personally updating attendees on their activities. Cadet Sierra Blue, the Brigade Respect Captain, talked about the USCC approach to diversity in the Corps. We then received an update from the Native American Heritage Forum, the Contemporary Affairs Seminar, the Cadet Gospel Choir, the National Society of Black Engineers, the Asian-Pacific Awareness Club, and the Spanish Language Club. Each of these organizations educates the Corps and the community on cultural affairs, sponsors observances and local activities, travels across the country in support of USMA being more visible in minority communities, and serves as a focal point for cultural differences. Each club has annual needs well beyond current resources.

In addition to the seven cadet presentations, Bill Perry outlined the AOG structure for funding minority cadet activities. At this time, a single account, the Minority Cadet Activities Fund, is available for consolidated support of these activities. Each year, a proposal for allocating funds will go from the USMA to the Minority Outreach Committee via the AOG. The Committee will make the final decision on the extent to which funds are either proffered or allowed to accumulate. The ultimate goal is endowment support for all of the listed activities. On Saturday morning, conference attendees offered more than \$15,000 in donations and pledges. Those who did not attend the conference or did not have a chance to offer support on Saturday morning may make donations payable to the Association of Graduates and restricted to the above fund. For additional information, contact, John Calabro at 845-446-1510, John-Calabro@usma.edu or Bill Perry at 212-455-8417, bperry07931@yahoo.com. For information on cadet programs, contact Andre Sayles at sayles@usma.edu or 845-938-2201.

SATURDAY LUNCH

We decided not to have a speaker at lunch due to the noisy environment in the Cadet Mess. However, it was good to be back in the mess hall and remember all of the good times had there—while taking big bites.

SATURDAY AFTERNOON PANEL DISCUSSIONS

The professional development panel discussions on Saturday were clearly a high point of the conference. On short notice, we gave MG Ron Johnson the floor for about 45 minutes. MG Johnson is the Commander of the Gulf Region of the US Army Corps of Engineers and also the US Deputy to the Program Management Office, Coalition Provisional Authority, Iraq. MG Johnson talked frankly about re-building Iraq and offered a powerful slide show that left no doubt about the importance of his mission. Following MG Johnson's presentation, we continued with the planned junior and senior success panels, organized by John Hampton and Archie Wilmer. The junior panel featured Librado Rivas, Darryl Rogers, Thaddeus Underwood, and D'Hania Hunt. Irving Smith served as moderator. The senior panel included COL Janice Hudley, MG Fred Gorden, MG Ron Johnson, and Mr. Herman Bulls. Archie Wilmer served as moderator. Unfortunately, time was limited; however, we could have easily spent an entire day

listening to the great advice from both groups. Topics included professionalism, mentorship, consensus building, networking, and special challenges in today's society.

SATURDAY EVENING NETWORKING PARTY

Thanks to John Calabro and the AOG, we were allowed to use the new Kimsey Athletic Center for the final social function. As always, the closing event is a great opportunity for friends, alumni, USMA staff, USMA faculty, and cadets to grip hands in an informal setting and talk about what it is really like inside and outside of West Point. This event exceeded all expectations in attendance, dining, and dancing. Thanks to the cadets of WKDT for setting up equipment and providing great music.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There are far too many selfless individuals associated with the conference to mention everyone. We do appreciate the dignitaries who made sacrifices to be a part of the activities, including Reginald Brown, Larry Ellis, Julius Becton, Fred Gorden, Ron Johnson, Rhett Hernandez, Barbara Farmer, Edgar Farmer, Janice Hudley, Curtis Harris, and Herman Bulls. We are thankful for the support of Booz Allen Hamilton and their representatives, William Wansley, Angela Messer, William Butler, Eric Blaylock, Steve Gibson, and Young Bang. We appreciate the professionalism and selflessness of the AOG staff and planners including John Calabro, Nancy Calhelha, Bridget Suarez, Nicole Corbin, Debbie Evans, Leslie Rose, Patty Pfanzelter, and Karen Armstrong. We appreciate the hard work of USMA personnel: Andre Sayles, Rob Gordon, Archie Wilmer, Les Knotts, Dawson Plummer, Greg Cruell, Bob Johnson, and WKDT. Finally, thanks to the USMA leaders for their commitment to diversity and support of the conference.

NEXT CONFERENCE

The possibility of an annual conference is under consideration by the Minority Outreach Committee Chair and the Association of Graduates leadership. The USMA Staff and Faculty may have difficulty making the time investment necessary to put on an annual conference to the standards of the 2004 event. However, due to technology services that can be provided by the AOG, event coordinators and even the conference chairperson need not be assigned to West Point. The idea currently on the table is to hold a conference like the 2004 event during even numbered years and consider a workshop format during odd numbered years. The conference format is well documented in this report. The workshop format would likely consist of a series of briefings on a specific topic (e.g. minority recruiting, minority alumni services, cadet support, mentorship for ethnic minority cadets and officers), followed by facilitated group work to develop new ideas for improving existing circumstances. At the end of the workshop, each group would present their results. Ideas offered to the AOG, USMA, the MOC, or alumni would be consolidated and provided as feedback. Ultimately, action plans would be developed for ideas adopted by the respective entity.

The default date for the next conference or workshop is 7-9 April 2005. To volunteer for the conference committee, comment on conference/workshop plans, or for additional information, contact Bill Perry (MOC Chair) at 212-455-8417, bperry07931@yahoo.com. John Calabro (AOG) at 845-446-1510, John-Calabro@usma.edu, or Andre Sayles (USMA) at 845-938-2201, sayles@usma.edu.

CONFERENCE FEEDBACK

If you attended the conference or have received substantial feedback from someone who participated, please provide after-action comments to Andre Sayles at sayles@usma.edu. We will be looking at both frequency and format for future conferences. We already have the following thoughts:

- Busy schedule—may have tried to do too much
- More time for panel discussions and similar opportunities to hear from successful people
- Cadets were great on Saturday morning—inspiring presentations
- Excellent networking party, including location

Thanks to all for your tireless support of the United States Military Academy.

Conference Committee