

DEOMI Welcomes First In-Residence Students Since March 2020

Story by DEOMI Public Affairs
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PATRICK SPACE FORCE BASE, Fla. – The Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute (DEOMI) welcomed its first in-resident students, since start of the global coronavirus pandemic in March 2020, on Monday at the start of DEOMI’s week-long Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) - Special Emphasis Program Manager (SEPM) course.



PATRICK SPACE FORCE BASE, Fla. – Organizers, facilitators and 30 students of the Equal Employment Opportunity-Special Emphasis Program Manager course pose for a class photo April 20th, 2022, during the first in-person course offered at the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute (DEOMI).

This much anticipated return of 30 in-resident students is the newest benchmark entry in DEOMI’s storied history of supporting DoD mission readiness objectives.

Since its inception in 1971, DEOMI has enhanced the DoD’s mission readiness by fostering positive human relations. That mandate has been carried to the Services by over 52,000 DEOMI graduates. These graduates maximize organizational cohesion and maintain the highest degree of mission readiness while maintaining the DoD’s reputation as a place where all individuals have infinite dignity and worth.

On March 11, 2020 the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic. The U.S. braced for the eventual community-wide spread of the novel coronavirus, forecasted to cause severe disruption to everyday life. Shortly after, DEOMI had no choice but to shut its doors to students. Up to that point, DEOMI provided Equal Opportunity (EO), EEO, and Human Relations (HR) training to nine different components, to include Active Duty, Reserve, and National Guard, and Civilians.

In efforts to continue providing mission readiness support to these components, DEOMI officials realized they had to convert 100% of DEOMI’s courses into distance-learning courses, virtual courses, or a hybrid combination of the two.

“We took few months to interview personnel from the service academies, the private sector, and those who were providing online training” said Mary Cooler, a 10-plus years DEOMI veteran and EEO department head. “The goal was to develop a contingency plan to continue to provide uninterrupted training.”

“DEOMI was able to accomplish this by leveraging various forms of technology to adapt to the virtual environment and following other institutions lessons-learned,” she added.

This was an enormous task considering most of DEOMI’s staff were teleworking during this time. Nevertheless, staff from each of DEOMI’s directorates came together to make this shift in environment and methodology possible.

As a result, Cooler said DEOMI was able to successfully train “approximately 500 students” in 2021.

However, DEOMI's successful adaptation to a virtual environment came with a unique set of limitations. DEOMI's courses are designed to be people oriented and the anticipated effectiveness of student to instructor interactions proved to be one dimensional behind a computer screen.



Sider talks with 30 students attending the SEPM course April 18th, 2022, at DEOMI.

“The virtual environment has shown us this”

According to Dr. Kervin Sider, DEOMI EEO specialist and SEPM course manager, the best environment for teaching and learning “occurs in person.”

“The virtual environment has shown us this,” he added.

What Sider was referring to is that while virtual courses provided DEOMI with a much needed method for training students and supporting DoD's mission readiness, it's not the preferred method.

“We can provide a better product to our customer, the DoD, when our lessons are taught in person.” Said Dr. Sider.

Earlier this year, Patrick SFB began lowering its COVID19 restrictions. Shortly after, DEOMI began implementing plans to bring back in-residence students. Just like before, this was another enormous task for DEOMI; and again, staff from each directorate came together to make in-resident student courses possible.

“I was not here during the initial shut-down, but it was a unique experience being involved in our team quickly making the transition to virtual learning.” said Jennifer Walton, a DEOMI EEO Instructor.

The virtual environment DEOMI created started out as a temporary solution to a temporary concern. However, the unexpected longevity of the pandemic allowed DEOMI to fine-tune its virtual environment capabilities; resulting in talks of possibly retaining some virtual courses even after students return.

EEO-SEPM organizers and facilitators received the new arrivals with a warm welcome followed by brief introduction. Afterwards, the general consensus among EEO-SEPM organizers and facilitators was that it was a good feeling to be heading back to some degree of pre-pandemic normalcy.



Walton talks with 30 students attending the SEPM course April 18th, 2022, at DEOMI.

As the institute transitions back into an in-person environment, DEOMI's commitment to DoD partners remains the same; to train EO, EEO, and HR professionals current and ready to perform their duties.

To learn more about DEOMI, please visit www.defenseculture.mil and www.facebook.com/DEOMI.DoD. DEOMI's website provides a variety of tools, training products, and information to support leaders across the DoD in improving their organizational culture.