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Twenty-four M.B.A. students participate in Marine leadership program

Meredith becomes only the fourth college in the nation to participate in leadership program.

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Meredith students enrolled in the Master of Business Administration (M.B.A.) program had a unique, once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to attend the best leadership training program our country has to offer.

On Thursday, 24 M.B.A. candidates from Meredith attended a leadership development training program at the United States Marine Corps Officer Candidates School in Quantico, Va. The weekend-long program, entitled "Learning Leadership and Decision Making Under Uncertainty and Complexity," is designed to directly challenge individuals to reflect and reexamine their moral character.

All potential U.S. Marine Corps officers undergo the intensive training that these students had the opportunity to experience in an

abridged version. This is quite a unique opportunity for Meredith students since only three other universities participate in the leadership training program. Wharton School of Business at the University of Pennsylvania, the top-ranked business school in the country by *Business Week*, sends approximately 80 graduate students to Quantico each year to engage in this training.

Students at the University of Virginia and Johns Hopkins University have this unique opportunity as well.

According to Dr. Sidney Adkins, dean of the School of Business and retired Marine Corps colonel, Marines have the reputation of having great success with demanding tasks because of the quality and depth of their leadership training. As one who has personally experienced the training, Adkins sees the value in building strong leadership skills for students who hope to become leaders in the corporate world.

Adkins currently teaches a leadership course in the

M.B.A. program and decided to incorporate this training at the Marine Corps base as a component for the class because the idea was well received by students.

Adkins described the training as a "broadening and stretching experience." Laura Query, M.B.A. candidate, agreed with Adkins's description of the program. She said the program was challenging for her, but it was a bonding experience for the students.

After arriving at the Officer Candidates School in Quantico, Va, participants lost their identities as M.B.A. candidates and assumed a new identity as a potential Marine Corps officer. As Adkins explained, the participants were treated just as Marines are.

They were picked up by drill instructors who led them to the barracks. Friday morning students attended a lecture on leadership by a senior staff member at the Marine Corps base. Following the lecture, students were divided into teams that consisted of approximately five members each. The teams

were presented with arduous tasks, filled with obstacles and imposing time limits.

"It is not whether you accomplish the task or not where the learning occurs, it is in the process," Adkins said. Each individual's performance under the stressful situation reveals a great deal about the group dynamics and each person's approach to problem solving, decision making and leadership. A key element in the exercise is reflection, which serves for each person to examine him or herself and identifies his or her weaknesses and strengths. Participants reflect on their approaches to solving the task under experienced drill instructors who identify their shortcomings in dealing with the task.

Following these exercises, participants tackled another challenge, the Leadership Reaction Course. According to Adkins, the experience "serves as a laboratory for students because they learn through trial and error." At this point, the drill instructor emerges as a coach to guide participants.

Successful completion of the course requires teamwork and dynamic decision-making skills under pressure. Query said, "It enables you to rise above your own apprehensions about yourself for the betterment of the team."

Adkins said that engaging in this leadership program offers several benefits for participants. The learning objective, he said, was, "to serve as a laboratory for students, develop leadership and build camaraderie among students."

He said the program offers students an outstanding opportunity to apply the concepts of leadership learned through coursework in the M.B.A. program. Adkins stressed the importance of leadership in the corporate world by distinguishing between those who are often labeled as leaders and those who are true leaders. He said what is often called leadership is better classified as management. True leaders, according to Adkins, possess a strong moral character.

See Marines
Page 2

On the inside:

Check out the schedule for Celebrating Student Achievement Day!

Page 2

Find out about a recent rash of campus thefts.

Page 3

Read the latest round of letters to the editor.

Page 7
