Anywhere, Anytime Learning in DoD

Long a world-class trainer, the Department of Defense (DoD) is leading the way into the learning environment of the future.

Recognizing that today's communications, information, and learning technologies allow a unique opportunity to develop common solutions to common learning challenges, the DoD's approach has been to form close partnerships, not only across the military departments and defense agencies, but with other federal agencies, academia, and private industry. The Advanced Distributed Learning (ADL) Initiative is the DoD's vehicle for developing and applying learning technologies on a broad scale.

Last year, Deputy Secretary of Defense John Hamre directed the Under Secretary for Personnel and Readiness to develop an Advanced Distributed Learning Initiative to "identify more efficient and effective ways to educate, train and support DoD personnel." Secretary of Defense William S. Cohen published DoD's Training Technology Vision to "ensure that DoD personnel have access to the highest quality education and training that can be tailored to their needs and delivered cost effectively, anytime and anywhere." The White House issued an Executive Order that created a Federal Task Force to "recommend . . . policy to make effective use of technology to improve training opportunities for federal government employees," that cited DoD's ADL Initiative as a model for other federal agencies to follow. At Congress' request, the department published the *DoD Strategic Plan for Advanced Distributed Learning.*

ADL is not limited to education, training, or performance aiding. It encompasses them all. The ADL Initiative is designed to leverage the full power of communications, information, and learning technologies—through the use of collaboratively developed common standards—in order to achieve Secretary Cohen's vision. The engine of this exciting revolution in learning is the Internet, as it is rapidly becoming the engine of all contemporary commerce, communication, and learning. Furthermore, the ADL Initiative seeks to satisfy the needs of everyone associated with learning and performance, including teachers and students, administrators, developers, managers, parents, evaluators, and others. It involves a number of challenges.

The challenge to teachers is to understand and apply the new technologies in concert with, in addition to, or in some cases in place of, traditional learning methods. The challenge to developers is to design methods of instruction and content that are open-architecture, shareable, high quality, and cost effective. The challenge to the information technology sector is to field an infrastructure that supports anytime, anywhere learning with appropriate bandwidth, transaction security, and robustness that is transparent to the learner.

These are not easy challenges. They require unprecedented collaboration and consensus building. ADL, like so much of contemporary life, is about converging historically separate domains in order to reach a whole greater than the sum of its parts. Since the birth of distributed communications networks 30 years ago, we have seen computing, communications, and telecommunications converge into today's Internet of global reach and empowerment. The complexity of the evolved infrastructure demands a cautious approach to policy and practice.

Standards for access, content, procedures, and security must be carefully thought through in order to ensure that the anytime, anywhere paradigm of the new learning environment is preserved and nurtured. Perhaps the greatest challenge of all is culturally adapting to the new paradigm and the new capabilities. The DoD must re-engineer the way it learns and, by extension, the way it does business.

The ADL Team in DoD is working diligently to help the entire department maximize the benefits from adapting learning technologies. They have established a Total Force Advanced Distributed Learning Action Team, which meets monthly to document and coordinate learning initiatives throughout the military departments and defense agencies. In conjunction with the Department of Labor and the Institute for Defense Analyses, a nonprofit think tank, they have established an ADL co-laboratory to bring government, industry and academia together to test commercial product offerings against learning requirements. A *sine qua non* for the success of the ADL Initiative is the implementation of standards and guidelines that have been drafted via collaboration between the department and major standards development organizations, including the Instructional Management System, Aviation Industry Computer-based Technology Committee, and Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineering —with DoD co-sponsorship—to ensure cost-effective sharing and reuse of content. In addition, the Director for Defense Research and Engineering, military department laboratories, and several academic institutions have begun significant efforts to research how we can use such technologies to learn and to find ways to accelerate the process.

The ultimate ADL Initiative goal is to deliver effective learning where and when it is needed by the men and women of the Department of Defense. Doing so is essential to making them ready to respond to an uncertain international security environment that demands that they make more deployments, more rapidly, for more complex missions, than ever before. For more information about the ADL Initiative, visit www.adlnet.org◆

About the Author

As Director for Readiness and Training Policy and Programs in the Office of the Secretary of Defense, **Mike Parmentier** is the OSD focal point for for all DoD training policies and programs. He guides and oversees DoD's training activities and budgets, including infrastructure (base realignment and closure, land withdrawal, ranges), learning technologies (distributed learning, distributed simulation, range instrumentation), exercises, equipment acquisition, training readiness reporting, and research and development. Parmientier leads several training committees, serves as Executive Secretary for the Defense Science Board Task Force on Military Training and Education, and represents the DoD on the President's Task Force for Federal Training Technology.