



Instructor Advocacy: Georgia

School Impact Story: Ft. Gordon Signal Corps, U.S. Army

“We hope to prepare our students for strong careers in ICT even outside of the military. In the private sector, productivity and profitability of companies may depend on how well they do their jobs. In the military, lives depend on how well they do their jobs. When I hear that my students feel very well prepared, that’s the feedback I value the most.”



The U.S. Signal Corps was established in 1860 when Major Albert Myer developed a visual signaling system for the Union army during the Civil War. Today, signal support encompasses all aspects of designing, installing, maintaining, and managing information networks for the U.S. Army.

In 150 years of service— including establishing the national weather service—the tools and technologies used by the Signal Corps have changed dramatically. Training is central to the readiness of the Signal Corps, and Fort Gordon is the center of that training.

Located southwest of Augusta, Georgia, Fort Gordon provides year-round training for more than 54,000 reservists as well as Army and Navy Reserve Officer Training Corps students. The U.S. Army Signal Center of Excellence at Fort Gordon trains more military personnel than any other training center of the U.S. Army.

In 2000, as part of its creation of the School of Information Technology, Fort Gordon partnered with Cisco to create a Cisco® Networking Academy®. Almost 8,000 soldiers have completed Cisco courses, including IT Essentials, Cisco CCNA®, and Cisco CCNP® courses.

The program has played a vital role in training soldiers to support modern communications systems, as the army has transitioned from analog to digital systems around the globe.

Today, the Cisco Networking Academy at Fort Gordon trains enlisted personnel, noncommissioned officers (NCOs), and officers, including warrant officers (WOs). In the army, a warrant officer serves in specific positions that require increased technical expertise, leadership, and management skills.

Senior WO Chief Warrant Four David Smith came to Fort Gordon from Fort Stewart. During an 11-month deployment

in Iraq, Smith began what he describes as “on the job networking training.” When he transferred to Fort Gordon, he had the opportunity to become more involved in networking technology through the Cisco Networking Academy. His interest and proficiency led to his current position as an instructor and technical advisor for the Network Management Division at the School of IT.

Smith knows first-hand the importance of being prepared in the field, and he considers the Cisco Networking Academy courses to be vital to the preparedness of the WOs in the field, as well as future jobs outside of the military.

“My students are clearly aiming for as much as they can learn, to prepare for as many different situations as possible. The Cisco Networking Academy students are very well trained in the skills they need, which means that they’re serving their units to the best of their abilities.”

Training for Life-Saving Readiness

Enlisted soldiers take CCNA 1-2, which gives them an understanding of network fundamentals and an introduction to routers. As they rise through the ranks, they become NCOs and take CCNA 3-4. Once they become senior NCOs, they come back for CCNP courses. Officers have different options as

they move up through the ranks. Approximately 900 officers take the CCNA courses annually, and another 100 take the CCNP courses. The WOs take CCNA 1-4 immediately, and after several years in the field, they come back for CCNP curriculum.

From his tour of duty, Smith was well aware of the importance of being prepared in all situations:

“It is challenging to anticipate everything that students will encounter in the field – in all parts of the globe, in combat and non-combat situations. WOs may find themselves in regions of the world where there is virtually no communications infrastructure. Under these conditions, our students have to be resourceful problem-solvers. Lives can depend on it.”

WO1 Dwayne Hodgson wrote: “I am in Iraq now with my division. What I learned in [the academy] gave me a huge foundation for learning my job. If the students are willing to listen and learn, the school will give them the tools necessary to succeed. Thank you for getting me ready for the Signal Warrant Officer Corps.”

Six months after his students have deployed to their units, David Smith reaches out to them for feedback. For example, based on

feedback from a recent WO graduate in the field, Smith decided to move some of the CCNP material into the CCNA courses.

“I want to know if we covered the right course material so the WO handled every contingency confidently. Should we update the course material to include something that a graduate has encountered in the field? What can I teach them, and what can I learn from them to teach others? The courses must be relevant to their unit jobs, or we’re not doing our jobs as instructors.

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The preparation is important to prepare WOs for as many different situations as possible, in and out of combat, anywhere in the world. However, Smith is also aware that he is providing his students with training that will be marketable outside of the military.

“We are constantly improving our labs to make sure we are keeping up with what is going on in the industry, at the same that we’re keeping an eye to the tactical side of what the WOs might need to know for military operations.”