It is necessary to overhaul the junior enlisted professional military education (PME) curriculum to better prepare Marines for the complexities of their career regardless of their intent to reenlist or depart from military service. A plethora of skills are common to success in and outside of uniform; the Joint Chiefs of Staff identified a few traits they deem to be of the utmost importance, “judgment, analysis, and problem-solving skills,” among others. While their publication focused on restructuring officer PME, it is foolish to think these attributes are not central to enlisted Marines. MajGen Mullen, the former commanding general of Training and Education Command, identified this need stating that the Marine Corps’ new operating concept “will force small-unit leaders to make important decisions, potentially without the time or the ability to check-in with higher headquarters first.” The organization must develop the instructional capabilities of the force through the creation of a Master Instructor primary MOS. In conjunction with this, the organization needs to reevaluate what is taught to the Marines. Lastly, the Marine Corps should place more of an emphasis on assessing the force in its efforts to develop an institution-wide intellectual edge.

A single institutional change could improve educational outcomes throughout the Service. As an instructor, a Marine serves a three-year tour with minimal training. The shortfall in training is because of manpower and time. The Service does not have the personnel to allow staff noncommissioned officers (SNCOs) to spend a year in training before instructing classes to Marines. Second, there is not an existing framework to allow instructors time and space to attend in-depth coursework on educational theory and pedagogy. It is unrealistic to think every instructor can attend a yearlong course on education, but there is a workable compromise that when implemented will yield higher results—instituting a Master Instructor primary MOS. MCDP 7, Learning, addresses the issue of retaining quality instructors “[attracting], rewarding, and retaining a highly qualified cadre of effective instructors is a crucial factor in facilitating Marines’ learning and requires senior leaders to recognize the importance of learning. An appropriate focus on the selection processes is essential to select the right Marines as instructors, trainers, and educators.” The Master Instructor career path would mirror the Career Recruiter MOS with additional qualifications. To be eligible for the MOS, a Marine would need to be a senior staff sergeant in zone for promotion to gunnery sergeant or currently a gunnery sergeant. To man this program, there would be two gunnery sergeants as Master Instructors at each recruit depot and two at each School of Infantry, one at each of the academies and Officer Candidate School/The Basic School (master sergeant), and one Chief Master Instructor at Training and Education Command (master sergeant).
The most essential task for the institution is to continually reevaluate PME content at all levels and its presentation to Marines.
in the next higher Distance Education Program (DEP). The waiver process is not challenging but would require effort and initiative from the Marine. The requirements would entail a formal request in naval letter format, a biography, and short answer essay. Once submitted, it must be endorsed by the battalion’s (or non-infantry unit equivalent) senior enlisted advisor. Once endorsed, the unit’s administration section will submit it to MarineNet for implementation, allowing the Marine to enroll in the next higher DEP. This endorsement will ensure that the Marine is deserving of the waiver, and the process does not become just another requirement. The process for receiving the endorsement will be similar to that of a meritorious promotion. Each quarter a battalion is allotted one Marine per grade to take the next highest-level DEP PME. They will need to be vetted through their chain of command and go through a boarding process prior to their senior enlisted advisor’s endorsement. Following completion of this program, a Marine need only to attend their resident PME after promotion. This simple implementation now brings the institution closer to its goal of having Marines complete Resident PME within twelve months of promotion. By having a Marine complete the waiver process first on their own, with the guidance and correction of their platoon and company leadership, the institution can groom an entire generation of Marines to communicate more effectively. This will also better prepare the Marine for the arduous task of completing numerous essays once they attain a seat at the resident Sergeants School.

Writing has been identified by many leaders within the Marine Corps as a critical vulnerability. Within the enlisted ranks, many leaders fail to communicate in writing effectively. The SNCO academies have worked diligently to correct this deficiency, but not enough is being done at the unit level. To counter this vulnerability, the institution must intervene to teach our junior Marines writing at the lowest levels. Just as the Marine Corps embraces a systems-approach to training, it must embrace a systems-approach to education by increasing the academic rigor of junior enlisted PMEs. Implementing naval correspondence classes at the Lance Corporal Seminar and unit-led Corporals Course must be done immediately. The next enhancement would be moving EMPE5120AA, Communication from Sergeants Course to Corporals Course. To make this course more appropriate for corporals, the institution should remove the sections on interacting with the media and public affairs to ensure this course is not disproportionately long. Additionally, it is recommended to include two writing assignments to increase Marines’ written communication skills. The first assignment would be writing a basic order in the five-paragraph order format with an answer key and explanations available to the Marine’s leadership. Exposure to the format is more important than ensuring everything is correct; their immediate supervisor should be the one to assist the Marine in correct content for the order. Next, the Marine should read an approved book, from the Commandant’s Professional Reading List or otherwise, and write a book report on it. MarineNet should then have a prompt for their officer-in-charge to certify the Marine has done so. It is recommended for the officer-in-charge to “grade” the paper, providing constructive feedback to ensure the Marine is developed through this process. The report’s grade will not reflect in their MarineNet transcript.

Assessments are a useful tool to evaluate an individual’s performance at critical junctures in their career. It is clear multiple-choice tests are never the perfect solution in evaluating someone’s performance, but they have attained somewhat of a permanent status given their cost effectiveness, simplicity, and speed in grading, and unbiased approach to “right” and “wrong” answers. Learning briefly covers assessments, discussing the different types: diagnostic, formative, and summative, and then a short paragraph on their utility. Assessments should have a greater presence in the Marine Corps than they do today. Currently, there are a litany of assessments in initial training, but within the PME construct, assessments are sporadic and substantively lacking. Diagnostic assessments should be a requirement prior to acceptance into any resident PME; the diagnostic exam is one that would be suited to a multiple-choice test for the same reasons described above. If a Marine is seeking a waiver to attend the next rank’s DEP, the diagnostic assessment will let the Marine Corps know if that Marine currently possesses the potential to suc-
ceed. Instituting the diagnostic should assist in retention within the academies because the organization can eliminate candidates who do not yet possess the requisite knowledge; feedback from the assessment will inform the Marine what topics they should focus on prior to reapplying for their resident PME. This diagnostic also provides a framework from which leaders can tailor their mentorship to their Marines by focusing on what the academies will focus on, standardizing efforts across the Service. Next, just as civilian institutions have midterm exams, the academies will need to develop a formative assessment to provide feedback to students, ensuring students are retaining the information. The formative assessment can have aspects of multiple choice, but that should not be the primary method for this test. The passing or failing of the formative assessment would not be grounds for retention in the academy; rather, it is a tool with which instructors use to modify their instruction to better fit the students. Lastly, the summative assessment should be a culminating event, involving both written and practical application portions. The written portion would determine whether the Marine has retained the requisite knowledge of their grade, and the practical application would evaluate their leadership and field craft abilities. These portions should be weighted equally to ensure a Marine cannot graduate without passing both sections. Utilizing summative assessments is another way to ensure a quality product across the force. If a corporal passes the test, then they have demonstrated the potential to be promoted to sergeant. Instituting more comprehensive assessments will allow for a more proficient force.

The institution has taken the first step in creating an intellectual edge over the rest of the world by prioritizing learning with its publication of Learning. However, to execute the intent from the Joint Chiefs, a reevaluation of PME content and instructional methods must be conducted. Additionally, the delivery of material and skills gained through PME can be overhauled through the implementation of career instructors. Lastly, the institution needs to place a larger emphasis on assessments across the force to develop the intellectual edge needed. This endeavor is not an easy undertaking, and it will likely take years until these improvements are standard, but it is critical to begin the process now to better prepare the force for the conflicts of tomorrow.

Notes
5. Ibid.
8. MCDP 7, Learning.
9. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
14. MCDP 7, Learning.