

# The Petersen Chair at Marine Corps University

Enabling a more diverse faculty

by Col Kenneth D. Dunn

**W**hen America witnessed the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis on Memorial Day Monday, 26 May 2020, the country went into a tail spin to determine a list of actions from which to respond positively to the heightened awareness of the Black Lives Matter movement and other ways to correct institutional bias, discrimination, and racism. The Secretary of the Defense has mandated actions of each service since that time.

Earlier this past year, one of the more significant initiatives that our former Acting Secretary of the Navy, Thomas Modly, had implemented was his “Vector” series of changes. “Vector 13” was a wholesale change in Professional Military Education (PME) taught by the Navy and the Marine Corps. Secretary Modly called for the implementation of a Naval Community College and other initiatives that would require hiring more faculty, teaching, and administrative positions. This was seen as an opportunity to finally change PME by hiring diverse faculty members and enhancing curricula throughout these schoolhouses to reflect the rich cultural



*LtGen Frank E. Petersen, 1932–2015.*

history of our services and organizations. His resignation last June may have temporarily stalled this initiative, but the Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of the Navy now have the opportunity to make these changes.

The civilian faculty at MCU is not racially diverse, as most positions are held by a majority white staff and teaching faculty. In March 2020, the author,

*“The Marine Corps formally attacked its equal opportunity issue again in 2014 by forming a ‘Diversity Task Force’ at Quantico. I believe our uniformed male and female personnel will have more opportunity as a result of this Task Force. It may be time for a fresh look at our minority USNA [U.S. Naval Academy] graduates—where are they? I can also see there are no African-American Senior Executive (SES) members, a handful of GS-15s and NF 5s, and scant representation within Marine Corps school houses. I view this as a moral imperative—it must change. In my opinion, it is a very undignified process for most applicants, many of whom are veterans. CMC has given his guidance, hiring officials are obliged to follow.”<sup>1</sup>*

*>Dr. Dunn is a U.S. Naval Academy graduate, Class of 1974, a retired Marine Corps Colonel, a civilian Marine, and an adjunct faculty member at Marine Corps University (MCU). He is the author of Camp Lejeune Command: Commander’s Notes 1992–1995 published in 2015. (Read a review here). He earned his Doctor of Education degree from Nova Southeastern University in 2008. He first taught at Amphibious Warfare School in 1984 and has taught in military schoolhouses for over 30 years, to include MCU and the National Defense University.*

as adjunct faculty at MCU and assigned to HQMC, recommended adding a “Petersen Chair” at MCU to assist in ensuring a more diverse faculty and staff, as well as ensuring more inclusive course material is taught throughout the University. The Petersen Chair will add multi-cultural history, perspective, and speakers to each curriculum within MCU. This will be a sponsored chair by the Marine Corps University Foundation or an academic chair at MCU.

**Why the Petersen Chair is Important**


- *Recruitment and retention.* Of all of the armed services, the Marine Corps has yet to select and promote a minority four-star general. Education can have a direct impact on both recruitment and retention. Because Marines will take note of the racial and gender diversity in any environment, PME is particularly important. A proactive process will ensure we have a multi-cultural faculty for a multi-cultural Marine Corps. Other programs push these concepts through training, conferences, outreach programs, manpower, etc—but not PME. Education produces the long-term impact on any concept, particularly national security concepts that are undergoing change.
- *Impact.* The impact of a non-diverse civilian faculty at MCU is far-reaching and sends the signal that there are no qualified professors or staff “of color” available for hiring at MCU. This is false. Qualified minority candidates have applied; however since 1989, few have been hired.
- *Perspectives.* Each student is deprived of a different perspective on any number of issues within the school house at every level: NCO, SNCO, captain, major, and lieutenant colonel. Without a diverse faculty, critical aspects of our history are left out from the very beginnings of the Marine Corps—not only in history, but in politics, culture, and leadership. Unfortunately, white civilian faculty members—for the most part—do not know this history and, therefore, cannot teach it. Guest speakers inevitably look pretty much the same.
- *Instruction.* When the faculty is not diverse, the teaching is more of


**Commandant of the Marine Corps  
Equal Employment Opportunity Policy Statement**

The Marine Corps prides itself on its values of Honor, Courage, and Commitment. The principles and values instilled in each Marine and civilian Marine are the building blocks for making the right decisions at the right time, both on the battlefield and off. We should always respect human dignity and have a concern for each other. Our spirit of determination, dedication, and professionalism should adhere to a higher standard of conduct. Our moral character defines who we are and what we represent.

Equal employment opportunity covers all personnel employment programs, management practices, and decisions – including, but not limited to, recruitment/hiring, merit promotion, transfer, reassignment, training and career development, benefits, and separation. All personnel will have the freedom to compete on a fair and level playing field to provide equality of opportunity in every aspect of employment. People are our greatest asset, and I am fully committed to ensuring every civilian Marine is treated with respect and honor.

We will continue to demonstrate that the Marine Corps leads the Nation in providing equality of opportunity for all employees and applicants for employment, regardless of race, religion, color, sex (including pregnancy, gender identity, and sexual orientation), national origin, age, genetic information, or disability. Workplace harassment will not be tolerated. Harassing conduct must be corrected immediately. Reprisal against anyone who engages in challenging workplace discrimination will not be tolerated. I support all employees who exercise their protections under the anti-discrimination statutes. I fully expect every member of the Marine Corps to honor this policy.



Semper Fidelis,  
  
 David H. Berger  
 General, U.S. Marine Corps  
 Commandant of the Marine Corps

**Commandant of the Marine Corps Equal Employment Opportunity Policy Statement.**

the same. The Montford Point Marine story is a bittersweet story that illustrates how the Marine Corps has changed over the years, but it had to start somewhere. Names like Petersen, Huff, Capers, and Canley can be spoken with the same reverence as Puller,

members is important for all students. Students are actually “shortchanged” at MCU because of the limited exposure to diverse cultures and ideas. The Marine Corps cannot continue to educate its leaders in a limited cultural environment. The national security

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- *Personal example.* Personal example demonstrated through civilian faculty

environment and emerging threats become more diverse with each advancing terrorist attack.

- *Operational capability, jobs, assignments, promotions.* All the aforementioned leads to “enhanced operation-

al capability, jobs, assignments and promotions.” If there is no impact on these, there is no need to include in a professional curriculum. All students should be armed with at least an appreciation of the different cultures that make up our Marine Corps. We need to keep them in mind as we move to a more professionally educated service.

A website search conducted on 4 August 2020 of the current chairs at MCU revealed there are seventeen chairs: nine from the Marine Corps University Foundation, eight from MCU, so named “academic chairs.”

All chairs are filled by white professors or military with the exception of one. There is some change in the number of minority civilian professors throughout the entire university but not enough. We now begin another academic year with minimal diversity and inclusion.

### Conclusion

Ensuring we have a racially diverse faculty at our flagship university is not only a requirement but can be considered “a moral imperative.” We can no longer ignore the harm that is potentially caused by not acting on this issue.

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### Note

1. Kenneth D. Dunn, *Camp Lejeune Command: Commander’s Notes: 1992–1995*, (Bloomington, IA: AuthorHouse, 2015).

