

Civilian Employees Back to School on DCMA Sabbatical



by Ms. Katherine Crawford, Staff Writer

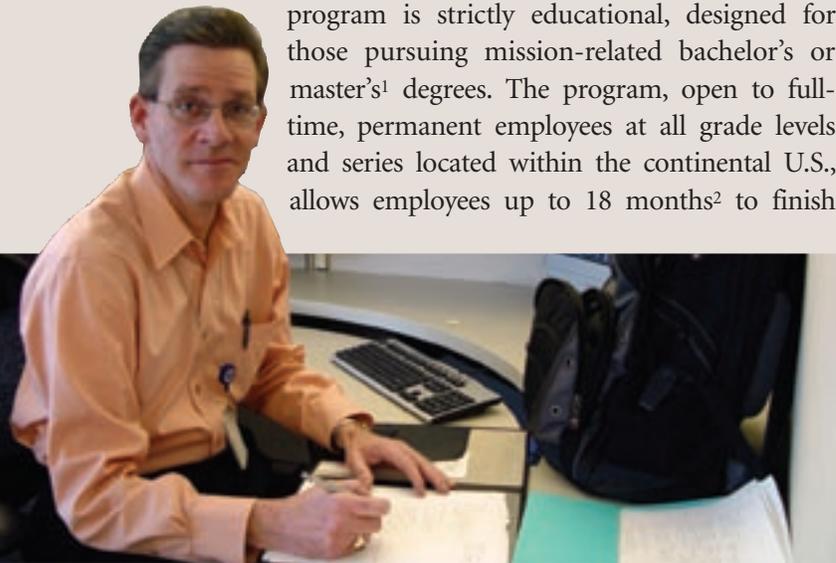
In January 2005, the Executive Development Board (EDB) approved 13 employees for participation in DCMA's new Sabbatical Program. The program generated much employee interest, and for fiscal year 2005 (FY05) there were 81 applicants. "Ultimately, there were a lot of great applications, but we just didn't have the money to support more of them this year," stated Mr. Steve Uehling, chief of the Workforce Development Division. The employees were selected from across the Agency and represented 10 different career series and career grades ranging from GS-7 to -14.

Unlike sabbaticals at other institutions, this program is strictly educational, designed for those pursuing mission-related bachelor's or master's¹ degrees. The program, open to full-time, permanent employees at all grade levels and series located within the continental U.S., allows employees up to 18 months² to finish

The program allows employees up to 18 months to finish their degrees.

their degrees, either part time or full time at an accredited college or university. Ms. Julie Floyd of Workforce Development believes that DCMA's program is unique. "I don't know how many agencies are doing anything like this. I think it is a very advantageous, innovative and long-sighted approach that we're taking."

Unlike the tuition assistance program, which pays employees up to \$250 per semester credit hour for mission-related course requests, the Sabbatical Program is highly selective. Applicants must complete an extensive application package. All applications are then evaluated by a Senior Executive Service panel chaired by the Agency deputy director, Mrs. Sallie Flavin, "which gives you an idea of how important this program is to senior management," said Mr. Uehling. According to Mr. Uehling, "the selection criterion that is foremost is cost — cost of the tuition and the cost of the time the employee will be spending out of the office. Thus an applicant who is only going to be out of the office six months full time or an applicant who is only going to be out of the office part time for 12 months has an advantage over someone who's going to be gone full time for 18 months." Focusing on cost enables the Agency to accommodate many requests within a limited budget. Employees who asked for more than 18 months were not considered for the program. "The 18-month period is firm, and you have to be



Sabbatical Program participant Mr. Chuck Kiessling, management analyst, DCMAC-F. (DCMA staff photo)

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(Left) Sabbatical Program participant Ms. Heidi Taylor, DCMA Raytheon Tucson. (DCMA staff photo) **(Right)** Sabbatical Program participant Ms. Carolyn Justice, contracting officer, DCMA Dayton. (DCMA staff photo)

strongly committed to finishing the degree in this period,” added Ms. Floyd.

Another of the selection criterion is an applicant's academic record, which might be a predictor of how well he or she will do in the program. Ms. Floyd reveals that “there were some people who were very honest and said, ‘I may not have done as well in college as I could have because I didn't take it as seriously, but now I realize how important it is.’” Adds Mr. Uehling, “So if you went to school 20 years ago and didn't do well, it wasn't held against you.” Other selection criteria include the post-utilization plan, in which employees outline how they will apply what they learn to their careers and what the advantages are to the organization, letters of recommendation, supervisory endorsement and school location. Employees are strongly encouraged to apply to schools within their local commuting areas. An employee may propose a non-local school with the understanding that there is no reimbursement for travel or temporary duty (TDY) expenses.

If accepted into the program, employees are required to sign a Continuing Service Agreement and a Mobility Agreement. The Continuing Service Agreement requires that an

employee serve with the federal government for three times the length of time the government agency invested in him or her. For example, someone who is enrolled in the program for one year must work for the federal government for three years after completing the program. A Mobility Agreement states that management retains the right to move someone to a different position and/or location in the Agency upon one's return from the sabbatical. People sometimes hesitate about this, but Ms. Floyd points out that the government is “making a substantial investment in the enrollees and thus it is not unreasonable to assume that they would require this type of agreement.”

Because one must be able to complete the degree within 18 consecutive months, the program is most beneficial to those who are close to completing their degrees. Those who, as Ms. Floyd says, “have been slogging along in the tuition assistance program, taking classes here and there, are now able to go full time and get that degree finished.” A few enrollees in the program are going to finish in less than a year by going full time and taking a full course load, where it might have taken them several years just following tuition assistance. “A lot of people have been very happy about that fact — it's like a dream come true,” she noted.

While enrolled, employees must maintain a B average. If the grading system is “pass/fail,” a grade of “pass” must be achieved. Failure to maintain the required grade point average will result in an employee's withdrawal from the program and return to work. Proof of grades must be submitted to supervisors within 60 calendar days of course completion. Employees who fail to maintain the required grade average or withdraw from the program without prior approval or notification through

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Sabbatical Program participant Ms. Karen Urschel, engineer, DCMAE-OCTD. (DCMA staff photo)

The Sabbatical Program is highly selective.

For those employees interested in applying for the Sabbatical Program, or those who were not selected this year, Mr. Uehling strongly encourages utilization of the tuition assistance program. “It gives you a big advantage: the closer you are to graduating, the less costly your degree is and the less time you will spend out of the office. Both of these factors make you more competitive.”

In the future, the Agency is looking to further leverage the program to suit workforce needs. “General Scott wants next year’s program to focus more on technical education,” reported Mr. Uehling. “So there will likely be special consideration next year for those employees seeking technical degrees.”

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their chain-of-command will be required to reimburse the government.

Employees may complete the program either full time or part time, and this year several employees are doing a combination of both, depending on when their classes are available. There are also one or two people taking a combination of online and classroom courses, so that is an option allowed by the Agency. It is important to note that for an employee to attend school full time, the employee must attend at least the minimum number of credits identified by the educational institution as being in full-time status. Typically, the number of credits for full-time status is 12 or 13 per semester, but this number can vary by school. Also, because employees remain on the DCMA payroll for the duration of the program, during school breaks they must return to work at their duty stations unless engaged in completion of school projects, research or assigned homework.

¹ Associate degrees are not part of the program because they do not count toward minimum educational standards, as established by the government for positions. Additionally, doctorate degrees are not included in this program.

² Exception: Applicants for Executive Level MBA programs have up to 24 months to complete their degree programs since most of these programs are conducted during non-duty hours and may require two years to complete.

Current Sabbatical Program Participants and Their Degree Programs

Mr. James Allen, industrial specialist, DCMA Industrial Analysis Center, *Bachelor of Science in management information systems*

Ms. Jennifer Allen, contract specialist, DCMA Denver, *Master of Business Administration*

Ms. Alicia Cyr, information technology specialist, DCMA-IT, *Bachelor of Arts in business management*

Mr. Anthony Fiaschetti, industrial property management specialist, DCMA Maryland, *Master of Business Administration with a concentration in acquisition*

Mr. Scott Gunter, management support group chief, DCMA Denver, *Master of Business Administration*

Ms. Carolyn Justice, contracting officer, DCMA Dayton, *Bachelor of Science in business management with a concentration in organizational leadership*

Mr. Charles Kiessling, management analyst, DCMAC-F, *Bachelor of Science in computer information systems*

Ms. Melissa Loretan, management assistant, DCMA General Dynamics ATP Burlington, Vt., *Bachelor of Science in professional studies in business*

Ms. Patsy Oburn, industrial specialist, DCMA Combat Support Center, HQ, *Bachelor of Professional Studies in leadership and management*

Mr. David Rugg, contract management examiner, DCMA

Mission Review Team, *Bachelor of Arts in organizational management and communication*

Ms. Heidi Taylor, quality assurance specialist, DCMA Raytheon Tucson, *Master of Business Administration with a concentration in industrial management*

Mr. Stephen Turdo, industry analyst, DCMA Industrial Analysis Center, *Bachelor of Science in business administration, management*

Ms. Karen Urschel, engineer, DCMAE-OCTD, *Master of Science in management*

Mr. Brian Wood, information technology specialist, DCMA Denver, *Master of Science in computer information technology with a concentration in network engineering*

What the Program Participants Have to Say ...

"The main goal I hope to achieve with the Sabbatical Program is to earn my master's degree in business administration. I am a contract administrator, and I believe that having this degree would help me to be more competitive for future opportunities. Within the next five to 10 years a majority of the federal workforce is retiring. I am one of a new breed — I came in with the Keystone Intern program in 2001. There are a lot of changes that will be made during my tenure at DCMA, and I believe I can contribute to DCMA's continuous success in supporting our warrior. The Sabbatical Program is great so far, and it really has helped reduce the substantial costs of going to school. I just wish we had a program like this before."

— **Ms. Jennifer Allen, contract specialist,**
DCMA Salt Lake City

"The DCMA Sabbatical Program is one of the best opportunities I have ever had! I entered the program this quarter without a degree. By the end of next quarter I will have completed an associate degree in computer information systems, and I will have a bachelor's degree in computer information systems by June 2006. Without the Sabbatical Program I would have spent years attempting to obtain a degree. The knowledge and experience I gain will enable me to help DCMA continue to move into the future as the employer of choice!"

— **Mr. Chuck Kiessling, management analyst,**
DCMA Business Information Center (DCMAC-F)

"I am absolutely thrilled and honored to have been selected for this opportunity. I hope that DCMA continues to offer the program in the future. In addition to obtaining an organizational management and communication degree, I have three personal improvement goals that I hope to achieve through the program:

- Improve my ability to facilitate and lead groups/ teams
- Improve my supervisory skills
- Expand my network of professional contacts to help me achieve the first two goals

When I return, I will be better equipped to help DCMA achieve its goals and objectives."

— **Mr. David Rugg, contract management examiner,**
DCMA Mission Review Team

"I am extremely grateful for the opportunity to be a student in the DCMA Sabbatical Program. This program has allowed me the time and resources to further my education. Due to the significant amount of travel required by my job, I never was able to enroll in classes before. I was careful to select a program of study that I hoped would be beneficial, and I have hit the jackpot. I have only been a student for six weeks now, but what I have learned already is immeasurable. The benefits I am receiving through the Master of Science in management (MSM) will help me become

a stronger employee, and I will be able to apply what I've learned to benefit the Agency."

— **Ms. Karen Urschel, engineer, DCMAE-OCTD**

"While I was fortunate to have had the experience and education necessary to have been 'grandfathered' into the requirements of my current 1102 position, I have always regretted not finishing my college degree. I am extremely grateful to have been given this opportunity to devote my full attention toward doing so at this stage in my career. The accelerated program I am enrolled in is designed for adults who possess a significant combination of completed courses and work experience in the business administration profession.

"It was quite an adjustment to make after so many years, however, I am finding that I very much enjoy being back in the classroom learning new things. One class in particular, 'Fundamentals of Management,' is very enlightening because it covers the planning strategies and organizational transformations being made within DCMA over the last several years. It is nice to understand why we have made some of the changes, and it provides a good perspective on the challenges we are all facing in today's dynamic environment.

"Some of the classes will present subjects I've never explored, and I'm eager to see where that leads me. The pace of the program is very intense, and I spend much more time than I imagined would be required, but it's well worth it as I prepare for the future. I know that all of my education experiences over the coming year will be of great benefit to me once I return to work."

— **Ms. Carolyn Justice, contracting officer,**
DCMA Dayton

"I attend the University of Phoenix's Master of Business Administration (MBA) program for the purpose of meeting the Defense Acquisition Workforce Improvement Act level three education requirements for the General Schedule (GS) 1101 job series. A master's degree in business administration is preferred but not required. By earning my MBA I will be more competitive for career advancement in the GS-1101 job series. My career goal is to switch job series from GS-341 to GS-1101, and an MBA will be helpful and assist in meeting educational requirements.

"The Sabbatical program is very helpful because it allows me to take one day a week to complete homework, which is usually writing a paper or completing a group assignment. I am currently scheduled to graduate in June 2005."

— **Scott Gunter, management support group chief,**
DCMA Denver