



# Information Bulletin

**US Army Corps  
of Engineers**  
Engineer Research and  
Development Center

Topographic Engineering Center

*U.S. Army 1999 Research & Development  
Organization of the Year*

July 19, 2001  
Number 28-01

## OFFICIAL

**(Reminder:** All questions to the Commander's Mailbox are anonymous. If a situation arises in which a mailbox question or answer would benefit the workforce at large, permission will be obtained from the questioner and the Commander before publication of the item.)

### **Director's Answer to Long-Term Training (LTT) Policy Changes**

The Commander's mailbox recently received comments about long-term training policies. Since we were without a permanent Commander at the time, the Director answered the following comments. The summary of those comments and Dr. Houston's response are below:

### **Long-Term Training Policies**

#### **Comments:**

"I think the ERDC is making a huge mistake by limiting LTT opportunities to those who are considering a PhD program. LTT is a huge benefit of employment with the ERDC.

I had worked for ERDC for about six years when I was contacted by an outside company with a job offer, making more money than I was at the time. The only thing that kept me with ERDC was the fact that I could pursue my master's degree. At the time, I had no interest in pursuing a doctorate. I went through LTT and obtained my master's and because of the projects I've worked on, I have decided to go on to obtain my doctorate.

My point is this. If there had not been an opportunity for me to pursue my master's degree, I would have left ERDC long ago for private industry. The ERDC is losing many young people already. If this policy of using LTT for obtaining a doctorate degrees only is instituted, it will accelerate the process of losing young researchers and engineers.

I understand that there is an emphasis to get a PhD in ERDC, and I'm sure it is absolutely essential to have people doing PhD level work. If LTT is the vehicle being used to achieve this goal, we best make sure the pipe is filled . . . in this case with master's students."

#### **Director's answer:**

"Thank you for your comments. I'll provide the rationale for the decision.

Lab directors recommended this policy change for two reasons. First, those seeking Master's degrees have a viable alternative to LTT, but those seeking PhDs do not. We presently have about 150 people working on Master's degrees through courses at local universities. Labs typically pay all costs associated with these courses - tuition, books, and fees. Labs also make accommodations for people to rearrange their schedules to allow them to take courses offered during work hours. I don't have figures for the entire ERDC, but in the last 10 years, 125 people

at the Vicksburg site alone have received Master's degrees through this type effort. In contrast, most schools require at least a year of residency beyond a Master's degree to qualify for a PhD. In addition, local universities often do not have PhD programs. Therefore, LTT is typically the only alternative, other than leaving the ERDC, for someone to work toward a PhD. Also, if LTT were opened to people seeking Master's degrees, we would have about 150 applicants. If you had to compete with 150 people for a LTT slot for a Master's, you probably would have gone to private industry. The number of people who are willing to go through the rigors of obtaining a PhD are relatively small (and at the level the labs have decided they can afford), so the odds of someone going on LTT for a PhD are relatively good.

The second reason is an investment decision. ERDC is strongly reimbursable and has to operate like a business. I know of no business that sends Bachelor's degree people off to school for a year for a Master's degree where the business pays salary, per diem, tuition, and all other costs. To do so would be a huge benefit, but too huge to make business sense. We have not been having problems hiring people at the Master's degree level (other than the typical problem in government of not being able to get job offers out quickly enough). Hiring at the Master's degree level means we have not incurred the costs associated with employees obtaining Master's degrees. Concurrently, the number of people obtaining PhD's in science and engineering has declined steadily over the past couple of decades, and hiring at the PhD level is very competitive. If we send someone LTT for a PhD, it typically takes several years to obtain it, and his or her retention rate is high.

One final note - the ERDC has had a relatively low percentage of PhDs versus other DoD labs (e.g. 50% of the engineers and scientists at the Naval Research Laboratory have a PhD). DoD uses the percentage of PhDs as a metric of the quality of labs, and this influences funding provided for research.

The recommendation by the Lab Directors was, therefore, based on both the lack of a viable alternative for LTT for those seeking PhD's versus those seeking Master's degrees and the best use of limited funding. I think it is a good recommendation given the above."

### **Commander's Mailbox**

ERDC team members are reminded that an electronic mailbox has been established to allow employees to send questions and/or comments to the Commander. If an employee wishes to remain anonymous, his or her name will be deleted from the question before it is forwarded to the Commander for comment. Employees' questions will be answered via return e-mail. Answers to anonymous and frequently asked questions will be posted in the Employee Information Bulletin.

The address in Outlook is, "ERDC Commander." Again, all information is kept strictly confidential and all questions are addressed directly by the Commander.

### **Mckenna Speaks at Digital Earth 2001 Conference**

At NASA's invitation, Charlie Mckenna, TD, addressed the International Symposium on Digital Earth 2001 in Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada, recently. NASA leads the U.S. portion of the International Digital Earth initiative. NASA's Digital Earth program seeks to develop an interactive map of the world with various information which users could access via the Internet. Mckenna told attendees that Digital Earth "promises to transform human life because it will eventually encompass, in real time, all the information we have about the planet."

## **ERDC Researcher Selected as USACE Researcher of the Year**

E. William East of CERL has been selected as the 2001 USACE Researcher of the Year. As a DB-810-04 Research Civil Engineer in the Engineering Processes Branch, Mr. East conducts research that clearly identifies and defines problems causing cost and time overruns in the acquisition of traditional facilities.

His research into the design processes yielded two significant research results: (1) a model of the iterative design process that resulted in context-sensitive CADD-based automated review agent, and (2) identification of requirements for unsupervised machine learning tools applied to mine “lessons learned”. Based on an improved understanding of the design collaborative process, the nominee developed the Design Review and Checking System (DrChecks) and the Corporate Lessons Learned (CLL) System.

DrChecks is a web-based engineering collaboration tool that supports the rapid resolution of design quality issues. DrChecks decreases the cost of individual projects, decreases the cost of project management services, and targets frequent technical problems for management resolution. The Corps of Engineers, Department of State Foreign Building Operations, and GSA currently use DrChecks. As a result of this system, the government is obtaining reductions in construction cost and improved quality of federal facilities. The Department of State has resolved more than 23,000 problems with embassy designs worldwide using DrChecks. One-third of Corps Districts voluntarily subscribe to DrChecks and more than 2,300 Corps and contracting partners have collaborated on more than 340 projects to resolve more than 53,000 design quality problems.

The CLL is a web-based system that provides agencies the ability to capture, evaluate, and re-use corporate lessons learned and good work practice within existing information systems. CLL’s distributed architecture provides the framework for support of lessons learned in all Corps business areas. CLL was approved by the Corps’ Deputy Commander and mandated by the Corps’ Chief Information Officer.

Congratulations to Mr. East on his achievements and on his selection for this award.  
(Susan Koh, (603) 646-4500)

## **Calendar of Events**

May 15-July 31	Thrift Savings Plan Open Season
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## **Web Sites**

### **Inside ERDC Intranet**

<https://erdcinfo.erd.usace.army.mil>

### **ERDC Master Events Calendars**

<http://erdcinfo.erd.usace.army.mil/exec/index.htm>

### **ERDC R&D Personnel Evaluation Process Information**

<http://erdcinfo.erd.usace.army.mil/training/careerindex.htm>.

### **Ethics Training**

<http://erdcinfo.erd.usace.army.mil/training>

### **ERDC Awards**

<http://erdcinfo.erd.usace.army.mil/training/awards/awards.htm>

### **Local College and University Links**

<http://erdcinfo.erd.usace.army.mil/training/collegelinks.htm>.

**Lab Demo Statistics Available on Intranet**

<http://erdcinfo.erd.usace.army.mil/hr/labdemo/index.htm>

**Site Bulletins Available on Intranet**

<http://erdcinfo.erd.usace.army.mil/pao>

**ERDC Travel Update**

<http://erdcinfo.erd.usace.army.mil/lm/travel>

**ERDC Publications on Internet**

<http://erd.usace.army.mil/pubs/index.htm>

**ERDC Job Vacancies**

<http://erdcinfo.erd.usace.army.mil/hr/vacancies/index.htm>

<http://www.cpol.army.mil/va/scripts/public.html>

<http://www.usajobs.opm.gov/a9.htm>

**Proposed OPM Product Design for Long-term Care Insurance Program**

<http://www.opm.gov/insure/ltc/design/introduction.htm>

**Basic Financial Management (web-based) Training**

<http://pdsc.usace.army.mil>

FOR THE DIRECTOR

JACKIE L. BRYANT  
Public Affairs Office

**U N O F F I C I A L**

**Blood Drive Results**

The goal of the July 13 blood drive was 45 units. A total of 46 units were collected. Rita Gray, TR-S, was a first time donor ... Congratulations! Thanks to all the Heroes!

The next Blood Drive is scheduled for Sept. 14. (Connie Dutton, TEC Blood Drive Coordinator, ICOM 2209 or (703) 428-7425)

**Summer Golf Outing**

The TEC Golf Association's Summer Golf Outing will be held at the Lee's Hill Golfers' Club Aug. 2 in Fredericksburg, Va. Prizes will be awarded for Longest Drive and Closet-to-Pin. The cost is \$45 per person and includes fees, cart and prize pool. Payment is due by COB July 26.

For more information, contact Mike Collins at 428-7424 or Theresa Rasmussen at 428-7889.