

Olmsted Scholar on the Frontlines

Mastering Anti-Corruption in Mexico City

By Capt. Shakir S. Robinson

Each year, three or four Marine officers are chosen through the Commandant's Career Level Education and Professional Intermediate Education boards to become Olmsted Scholars. These exceptional individuals immerse themselves in a foreign country, pursue a master's degree in the local language, and navigate the challenges of consistent regional travel. Positioned in unfamiliar environments, Olmsted Scholars are tasked with adapting, performing, and excelling, all crucial skills for Marine Corps officers in potential conflicts with great national powers.

Given the Marine Corps's potential engagements, officers must be adept in uncomfortable arenas. This foreign leadership opportunity sharpens critical thinking and human skills by compelling scholars to fully engage in local cultures, fostering adaptability and resilience. Equipped by the Olmsted Program, officers are primed to become strategic leaders with a comprehensive understanding of global dynamics, capable of navigating complex global issues in a rapidly changing international arena; continued promotion of this program is vital for development of future career-minded company and field grade officers.

CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING AND LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

In the post-Iraq and Afghanistan era, the importance of cultural understand-



Shakir Robinson participating in Socratic discussions during the 2023 Academic Year at the Universidad Panamericana in Mexico City, Mexico.

ing and foreign language proficiency became evident. The Olmsted Program addresses this need by preparing scholars to connect with local populations through deep cultural immersion and language study. It recognizes that achieving tactical, operational, and strategic objectives often requires effective communication and relationship-building across cultural boundaries.

General George H. Olmsted, a distinguished graduate of the United States Military Academy, served over 30 years in the U.S. Army, including coordinating communication plans in China during World War II. Following his military career, he founded the Olmsted Foundation, facilitating educational and cultural exchanges for top military officers across all branches of service.

MASTER'S DEGREE - STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

In March 2019, I was selected for the Olmsted Scholar class of 2023 and chosen as the 11th scholar to study in Mexico City, Mexico—the same location where the first Olmsted scholar studied in 1967.

After a comprehensive investigation of top universities in Mex-



The author, USMC Capt. Shakir Robinson in Service "A" uniform.

ico City, I applied to and was accepted into the Universidad Panamericana's School of Governance and Economics Master's degree program in anticorruption. The university's commitment to educational excellence, exemplified by distinguished graduate and former Mexican president Enrique Peña Nieto, drew me in.

Studying anticorruption aligns with lessons learned from recent conflicts, emphasizing my commitment to democratic ideals. The Olmsted Program not only provides academic opportunities but also equips officers with skills to address broader societal issues, contributing to national and international security.

REAL-WORLD APPLICATION

The master's program includes Socratic discussions and real-world case studies, preparing me to apply critical thought to practical scenarios—an alignment with the Marine Corps' focus on actionable solutions and strategic thinking. Instruction from a diverse group of professors and engaging discussions with classmates from various regions enriches the learning experience.

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