

IMMERSIVE ACQUISITION FELLOWS

The Defense Innovation Unit recognizes the selection of six contracting officers for the third cohort of the Immersive Commercial Acquisition Program for 2024-2025 during a ceremony at the DAU Campus on Fort Belvoir, Virginia, October 23, 2024. (Photo courtesy of DAU)



PROACTIVE LEARNING

Why DAU credentials are essential for today's acquisition professional.

by Staff Sgt. Summer L. McMahon

The April 9, 2025, Executive Order on Modernizing Defense Acquisitions, with its focus on reforming and training the defense acquisition workforce with innovative methods, highlights the critical importance of continuous learning for all acquisition professionals.

Supervisors and leaders should encourage their teams to leverage resources like Defense Acquisition University (DAU) credentials to enhance their technical competency, leadership skills and functional area knowledge in the field. Noncommissioned officers (NCOs) and officers who hold the Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) 51C or 51A career fields must effectively navigate

changing policies and regulations, budget constraints and rapidly advancing technologies to carry out their acquisition duties and responsibilities successfully; a DAU credential can help with this achievement.

While the Army offers significant resources, Soldiers must show initiative to obtain the requisite knowledge and utilize those resources effectively. Continuous learning benefits every Soldier personally and professionally, empowering leaders to make the most of available resources and encourage their teams to grow and develop.

A TAILORED AND TARGETED PROGRAM

To promote continuous learning focusing on specialty competencies, DAU has developed the Defense Acquisition Credential Program, which provides tailored and targeted resources to enhance acquisition processes and knowledge.

Despite their value, DAU credentials often go unnoticed or underutilized. Many Soldiers are unaware of their existence or the significant advantages they can offer by providing additional, just-in-time training. These credentials allow NCOs and officers the opportunity to distinguish themselves by gaining valuable knowledge directly applicable to their current assignments and developing key competencies. DAU credentials are an excellent opportunity for Soldiers seeking to advance their career in the Army. It can also strengthen the resumes of Soldiers preparing to transition out of the military.

A defense acquisition credential verifies that an acquisition professional possesses the knowledge, skills and abilities needed to be successful in a particular DOD acquisition-related field. These credentials help you learn new skills for various roles or strengthen existing skills as you advance in your career. These credentials focus specifically on skills used in defense acquisition and enhance related courses or certifications you may already have earned.

One thing to keep in mind is that several defense acquisition credentials have the same self-paced or virtual course. For example, these four credentials—Contracting for Services,

extra training without hindering unit operations due to extended absences.

There are also many credentials requiring only self-paced training, which can be completed at the Soldier's convenience. It is important to sit down with your supervisor and identify any DAU credentials that would be beneficial to complete, based on your organization's mission requirements, your professional development goals or other compelling reasons. Once your training needs are determined, you and your supervisor should schedule the courses for the credentials as part of your individual development plan so you can dedicate time and attention to completing them within the designated timeframe.

GETTING DOWN TO DETAILS

Continuous learning is essential for career development and effective leadership, and DAU credentials offer a wide range of opportunities that help build practical skills directly aligned with the demands of the functional area. These credentials give NCOs the knowledge and skills needed to excel in various acquisition roles, from managing complex projects to ensuring a quality product to leading teams, whether conducting service contracts within the continental United States or in a contingency contracting environment outside the continental United States.

Specific DAU credentials, such as Life Cycle Logistics, Acquisition Management, Acquisition Leader Development, Contracting and Small Business Programs, directly address an NCO's daily roles and challenges. These credentials build practical skills and

DAU credentials offer a valuable pathway for officers and NCOs to navigate the complexities of this field and enhance their technical and leadership competencies.

Services Acquisition Team Member: Acquisition Professional, Services Acquisition Team Member: Non-Acquisition Professional and Functional Service Manager—all require one virtual course: ACQ 265. These credentials also have several self-paced courses in common. If you complete all applicable self-paced courses, then you only need to take one virtual course to gain more than one credential. This allows Soldiers to get

show a strong dedication to professional growth, helping NCOs become more competitive for promotions and leadership roles. DAU courses and programs also develop key skills that can be applied across military environments, strengthening an NCO's ability to lead and succeed. When NCOs dedicate their time to DAU credentials and training, they invest in themselves, the unit and the future of the acquisition workforce.

Credentials	Self-Paced Courses	Virtual Courses
CCON 01 Advanced Proposal Analysis-Direct Costs and Cost Modeling	CCON 001: Actual Cost Video ACQ 0720: Intellectual Property and Data Rights CON 7100: Materials and Services CON 7110: Direct Labor CON 7120: Other Direct Costs CCON 001: Capstone Assessment	CON 7140V
CCON 017 Pricing Tools and Techniques	CCON 017: Pricing Tools and Techniques CCON 017: Getting Started with Power BI* CCON 017: From Excel to Tableau*	
CCON 025 Contracting for Services	CLC 030: Essentials of Interagency Acquisitions/Fair Opportunity CON 0130: Services Acquisition* CON 0640: Wage Determination CCON 025: Capstone Exercise	ACQ 265
CACQ 001 Services Acquisition Team Member: Non-Acquisition	ACQ 0030: Overview of Acquisition Ethics* CLC 011: Contracting for the Rest of Us CON 0130: Services Acquisition* CACQ 001: Capstone Exercise	
CACQ 002 Services Acquisition Team Member: Acquisition Professional	ACQ 1650: Defense Acquisition of Services CON 0040: Market Research CLE 028: Market Research for Engineering and Technical Personnel CON 0130: Services Acquisition* CACQ 002: Capstone Exercise	
CCON 13 Functional Service Manager	ACQ 0030: Overview of Acquisition Ethics* ACQ 1650: Defense Acquisition of Services CON 0130: Services Acquisition* CACQ 013: Capstone Exercise	

CREDENTIAL OPTIONS AND REQUIRED COURSES

This table shows the necessary courses for each credential and how shared virtual courses can make it easier to earn multiple credentials simultaneously. (Graphic courtesy of the author)

For officers, continuous learning is essential to managing the challenges of defense acquisition and leading successful programs and contracting support. DAU credentials provide a framework for learning and mastering the intricate skills required in program management, strategic planning and policy development. Earning credentials such as Program Management, Engineering and Technical Management and Executive Leadership Development equips officers with broader knowledge across the acquisition spectrum to effectively manage resources, mitigate risks and make informed decisions that impact major defense acquisitions. These credentials enhance an officer’s capabilities and contribute to the overall success of DOD programs while ensuring the delivery of critical capabilities to the warfighters. Furthermore, DAU credentials demonstrate a commitment to professional excellence and self-improvement, which are essential attributes for career progression and assuming positions of increased responsibility within the acquisition community. By investing in DAU educational resources, officers invest in their development as leaders and in the future of our nation’s warfighters.

DAU credentials are listed in the DAU iCatalog. DAU deploys new credentials throughout the fiscal year, so it is important to routinely check for new knowledge opportunities. Most credentials are available to all DOD and federal government employees. Some credentials require instructor-led training, either in a classroom or virtual environment. To earn a DAU credential, participants must complete all listed requirements, which might include training courses, videos, games, simulations or a capstone assessment. Some credentials utilize outside resources, but they are accessed through the DAU Virtual Campus.

Once the requirement for a credential is completed, it will appear on the DAU transcript. The Army Director for Acquisition Career Management Office receives credential completion data on a weekly basis, and the achievement of credentials will auto-populate on the Acquisition Career Record brief in the Career Acquisition Management Portal (CAMP)/Career Acquisition Personnel and Position Management Information System.

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Capstone assessments are graded using the standards in Part VII of the DAU Student Handbook, which requires a score of 80% or higher to pass. Anyone needing help with a capstone assessment can contact the DAU Help Desk for faculty support. Students have 12 months to complete a credential; failure to finish on time will result in disenrollment and require reenrollment. The certified period begins when the credential is earned and appears on the DAU transcript. Disenrollment from the program occurs after one year if credential requirements remain incomplete.

RENEWING A CREDENTIAL

When it comes to keeping credentials current, timing is everything. If the renewal requirements aren't met within the six-month grace period, the credential will expire and all credit towards that credential will be lost. The grace period is based on the credential's original start date.

According to the DAU credentials page, renewal requirements are typically published at least two months before the certification period ends. It is vital to understand how these dates correlate with achieving renewal. For example, if a three-year credential is awarded on March 1, 2022, the credential will expire on September 1, 2025—that's the three-year certification period plus the six-month grace period. However, if the renewal requirements are achieved, the credential remains and the validity will be extended. The new expiration date takes effect at the beginning of the renewal period, allowing the credential to remain valid until March 1, 2028, provided the renewal process is successfully completed with the six-month grace period (e.g., between March 1 and September 1, 2025). Keeping up with renewal requirements ensures the credential stays relevant and allows for continuous refreshment of the knowledge obtained.

CONCLUSION

To remain relevant in defense acquisition, continuous professional development is crucial. DAU credentials offer a valuable pathway for officers and NCOs to navigate the complexities of this field and enhance their technical and leadership competencies. By tapping into DAU's wide range of resources and committing to continuous learning, acquisition professionals can build their careers and strengthen the entire acquisition community.

Given the new administration's goal to modernize the acquisition process, acquisition professionals must proactively do their part. Please take a moment to review the many DAU credentials available, find the ones that match your career goals and start a learning journey that supports both your growth and the mission of supporting the warfighter. But be strategic, as some credentials share common courses, which can help you make the most of your time and effort. This is an excellent opportunity to sharpen your skills, grow as a leader and make a real impact on the future of the defense acquisition system.

For more information, go to <https://www.dau.edu>.

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