

# Chapter 11

## Change and the American Military School's Future: Lessons of COVID-19

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter explores the relationship between change and the American military school. Its objective is to demonstrate that the military school is not only readily adaptable to change, but in the process is an important agent for change. However, reaching that conclusion requires the reader to first understand what is often misunderstood, the nature of a military school. Upon that knowledge of the purpose, organization, process, learning model, and most significantly, the vision and mission of the American military school come the realization that this learning institution can be an effective catalyst for change. It therefore is an important segment of the American educational system and can have a vital role in sustaining America's leadership in the world. Support for that proposition is offered by analyzing how one American military school, the New Mexico Military Institute, has changed in response to a series of challenges to its future such as the COVID-19 pandemic. This chapter deals with leadership, learning, change, and the American military school.*

### INTRODUCTION

Guiseppe Tomus di Lampedusa wrote, "If we want things to stay as they are, things will have to change." Yogi Bera wrote, "The future is not what it used to be." Two statements by two men who lived centuries and continents apart, but both spoke of change and, in doing so, provide a challenge and message critical for the future of the American military school.

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## ***Change and the American Military School's Future***

This chapter presents a case that explores that assertion by 1) probing the military school's ability to change and arguing that not only is the military school able to adjust to external and internal change factors but it is a potent agent for change; 2) refuting the argument that the military school's, highly disciplined, structured approach to learning precludes change without abandoning its mission and purpose; and 3) affirming that military schools continue to have an essential role in the American education system.

The changes being made in every sector of the global society and economy, including education at every level, by the COVID-19 Pandemic form the backdrop of the argument. A recent article in the Wall Street Journal proclaimed, "From schools already on the brink to the loftiest institutions, the pandemic is changing higher education in America with stunning speed." (Knorr, 2020, p.1)

Similarly, the Chronicle of Higher Education stated a reality that is equally true for primary and secondary education as well.

*The Coronavirus Crisis has - in what seems like an instant - upended much of modern life, and higher education has not been spared. Campuses are closed and courses moved online, commencements canceled, and uncertainty and fear cloud the future. In the short term, students scramble to figure out their fall plans, the faculty faces hiring freezes, and administrators debate once-unimaginable options, like whether to declare financial exigency. The Pandemic might also permanently change the character of higher learning in America- its culture, its role in society and the economy, and the business models that sustain it. (The Chronicle, 2020, p.13)*

Recently, some have argued that online learning digital/distant education substitutes for the military school's traditional, in-place, classroom learning in brick and mortar intuitions, thus precluding effective leadership development instruction. The authors challenge that conclusion by examining one of the oldest military schools in the nation, the New Mexico Military Institute (NMMI). That school integrates both secondary and post-secondary learning. For more than 125 years, its organizational structure, learning model, and particularly the vision and mission have not been obstacles to change, but enablers. The evidence comes from understanding what a military school is and is not, what integral place it has in the American educational system, and what crucial role it serves in leadership development. The analysis will demonstrate how, over time, military schools continue to develop and address changes to traditional learning models, and, in doing so, offer solutions to the current crisis in American education and a declining role in America's national and global leadership position. But to achieve those outcomes, one must first review the very nature of a military school.

### **Better Understanding the Nature of a Military School**

As the authors have approached parents and students concerning attendance at a military school, the two most common responses are, "Why do you ask? My son or daughter is not interested in a military career" or "He (or she) does not have a behavioral problem." These responses suggest a widespread misunderstanding of the exact nature, purpose, and mission of a military school. Yet, it is in that misunderstanding one finds the basis for the case made in this work and why the military school is perhaps, more than other learning institutions, more compatible with change.

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