



Gratz Insider, November 2016 - Story Continuation

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### Student Spotlight on David Cotter: Bringing Holocaust and Genocide Studies to the U.S. Military

During his 30-year career in the Army, David Cotter was deployed in Iraq, Afghanistan and Qatar. He first arrived at the Command and General Staff College (CGSC) in 2009 as an active duty officer, assigned to the position of director of the college. Now, as a civilian employee, he is assistant professor and deputy director of the Department of Military History.

Over the years, there had been some interest in genocide studies percolating at CGSC. So, when the opportunity arose to send a number of faculty members to Poland in 2010 for an educational program at Auschwitz, Cotter authorized the trip. Upon their return, some of the professors began teaching electives on genocide and mass atrocities. Two years later, the college instituted an intensive seminar on this topic, which includes a week at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington.

Cotter is one of the seven professors assigned to teach this seminar. The relevance of genocide studies to the work of today's soldiers is something Cotter has witnessed firsthand. During his deployment in Iraq, he saw the gruesome result of sectarian violence: scores of slaughtered Shia and scores of slaughtered Sunnis, all targeted because of their religion.

To deepen his own knowledge of genocide, Cotter, who already has two advanced degrees, decided to further his education. As it turned out, he didn't have far to look. One of his colleagues, Mike Weaver, was enrolled in Gratz's online [master's program in Holocaust and Genocide Studies](#). At Weaver's recommendation, Cotter enrolled in the program as well. Cotter has found that he is able to take what he learns from Gratz right into the classroom at CGSC. And, as he points out, now almost 30% (two out of seven) of the instructors teaching the CGSC seminar are affiliated with Gratz.

One of the goals of this seminar is to train Army officers in supporting soldiers who are not prepared to confront mass atrocities. Another goal is to educate these senior leaders in recognizing genocide in its early stages so that they can try to prevent it from escalating.

"The paradigm for genocide is the Holocaust," says Cotter. "We want officers to take the concepts learned from the Holocaust and look for them in the places where they've been deployed. They must first learn how to recognize genocide and then take steps to stop it."

The seminar on genocide and mass atrocities has generated sufficient interest at CGSC that Cotter expects it to be continued. He says, "There is a group of us here who are very committed to it. We think it's very important."

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*The Gratz College Master of Arts program in Holocaust and Genocide Studies focuses on the Holocaust, its contemporary significance and the broader phenomenon of genocide in modern times. It is the first program of its kind that could be completed entirely online. For more information on this program, contact Mindy Blechman at [mblechman@gratz.edu](mailto:mblechman@gratz.edu) or at 215-635-7300, x154.*