



## DEPUTY SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

1010 DEFENSE PENTAGON  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301-1010

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### MEMORANDUM FOR CHIEF MANAGEMENT OFFICER OF THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

SECRETARIES OF THE MILITARY DEPARTMENTS  
CHAIRMAN OF THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF  
UNDER SECRETARIES OF DEFENSE  
CHIEF OF THE NATIONAL GUARD BUREAU  
GENERAL COUNSEL OF THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE  
DIRECTOR, COST ASSESSMENT AND PROGRAM  
EVALUATION  
INSPECTOR GENERAL OF THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE  
DIRECTOR, OPERATIONAL TEST AND EVALUATION  
CHIEF INFORMATION OFFICER OF THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE  
ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS  
ASSISTANT TO THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS  
DIRECTOR, NET ASSESSMENT  
DIRECTORS OF THE DEFENSE AGENCIES  
DIRECTORS OF THE DOD FIELD ACTIVITIES

**SUBJECT:** Directive-type Memorandum (DTM) DRAFT-144 – “Establishment of the Secretary of Defense’s Ike Skelton Strategic Thinkers Program”

**References:** DoD Manual 8910.01, Volume 1, “DoD Information Collections Manual: Procedures for DoD Internal Information Collections,” June 30, 2014, as amended  
United States Code, Title 10, Section 2005

Purpose. This DTM:

- Establishes policy, assigns responsibilities, and provides procedures for implementation of the ISSTP.
- Is effective [[DD enters publication date](#)]; it will be incorporated into a new DoD instruction on military education. This DTM will expire effective [[12 months from the date issuance is published on the Directives Division Website, inserted by the Directives Division](#)].

Applicability. This DTM applies to OSD, the Military Departments, the Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Joint Staff, the Combatant Commands, the Office of the Inspector General of the Department of Defense, the Defense Agencies, the DoD Field

Activities, and all other organizational entities within the DoD (referred to collectively in this DTM as the “DoD Components”). The term “Military Services,” as used in this DTM, refers to the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps.

Definitions. See Glossary.

Policy. Participants in the ISSTP will receive a Master’s degree from the contracted university in International Public Policy. Through the program they will be:

- Educated in strategic thinking, warfighting, and interagency strategic decision making, using interactive historical case studies and war games as problem-solving experiences, while drawing on the disciplines of applied strategic studies, history, and other subject areas.
- Equipped with the advanced cognitive and analytical skills necessary to engage civilian and military leaders on the development and conduct of military strategy and operations in the broader context of national policy objectives.
- Prepared to occupy demanding appointments as strategic thinkers and advisors in the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Joint Staff, a Combatant Commander’s staff office, a four star headquarters, the Department of State, or other federal agencies.
- Able to think and communicate both clearly and precisely in terms of making strategic assessments and communicating their ideas and intent.

Responsibilities. See Attachment 1.

Procedures. See Attachment 2.

Information Collections. In accordance with Paragraph 12 of Volume 1 of DoD Manual 8910.01, the nominations for the ISSTP, referred to in Paragraph 4.b of Attachment 1, do not require licensing with a report control symbol.

Releasability. **Cleared for public release.** This DTM is available on the Directives Division Website at <http://www.esd.whs.mil/DD/>.

Attachments:  
As stated

ATTACHMENT 1

RESPONSIBILITIES

1. ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR READINESS (ASD(R)). Under the authority, direction, and control of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness (USD(P&R)), the ASD(R):

a. Provides all necessary administrative support and funding for facilities, staffing, travel and per-diem, training, information management, and contract services associated with the ISSTP.

b. Provides resource management and administration, information systems, personnel, travel, contracting and logistics support associated with the ISSTP.

c. Develops appropriate metrics to assess post-program career development and progression of follow-on assignments for program graduates.

d. Provides appropriate guidance and direction for the selection process outlined in Paragraph 3.d. of Attachment 2 of this DTM and approves the final results.

2. DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR FORCE EDUCATION AND TRAINING (DASD(FE&T)). Under the authority, direction, and control of the USD(P&R), through the ASD(R), the DASD(FE&T):

a. Directly oversees program management, support, and implementation.

b. Chairs the interview selection panel that annually selects program participants from the Service members nominated by the Military Departments, in accordance with Paragraph 3.d. of Attachment 2 of this DTM.

c. Assists the Secretaries of the Military Departments in matching ISSTP graduate's follow-on and sequential career assignments to areas utilizing the special skills gained in the program and tracks post-assignment careers.

3. GENERAL COUNSEL OF THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE. The General Counsel of the Department of Defense provides legal advice, as necessary, in support of the ISSTP and the students.

4. SECRETARIES OF THE MILITARY DEPARTMENTS. The Secretaries of the Military Departments:

a. In accordance with the criteria in Paragraph 2 of Attachment 2 and the submission guidance in Paragraph 3 of Attachment 2, nominate two primary and two alternate candidates to the Director, Professional Military Education (PME), in the Office of the DASD(FE&T) for potential participation in the ISSTP. The Department of Navy will ensure the Marine Corps also submits two primary and two alternate candidates.

b. Submit annual nominations to the Director, PME, no later than December 1 of each year. An extension of the submission deadline can be provided upon a showing of good cause.

c. Require each selected candidate to sign an agreement in accordance with Section 2005 of Title 10, United States Code and Paragraph 4 of Attachment 2.

d. Provide administrative, personnel management, and appropriate funding for students assigned to the ISSTP from their respective Military Services, to include:

(1) A funded billet(s).

(2) Funding required for any necessary permanent change of station, travel to or from their assignment at the contracted university, and any temporary duty expenses required, prior to the start of the program or after graduation.

(3) Transfer of security clearance, permanently certified with passing authority, to the Director, Human Capital Management Office, Office of the USD(P&R) or, if required by the Military Service, to the appropriate Washington area Military Service Special Security Office.

(4) Designation of a single point of contact (POC) within each Military Service for all matters concerning the ISSTP.

e. Identify post-ISSTP assignments for Service members, to ensure that they are placed in follow-on assignments or sequential tours that utilize the special knowledge and skills gained through completion of the program.

ATTACHMENT 2

DESCRIPTION AND PROCEDURES

1. ISSTP DESCRIPTION. The ISSTP is a partnership between the DOD and a contracted civilian university offering a unique, highly selective, in-depth graduate level education, designed for intellectually talented military officers who wish to develop advanced analytical and strategic thinking skills.

a. The proposed curriculum for the ISSTP academic model consists of DoD-approved coursework, developed jointly through the DASD(FE&T) offices and the contracted civilian university. The curriculum conforms to the academic requirements of the civilian university and its accrediting agency and is designed to be completed in the equivalent of one academic year (AY). Through the ISSTP academic model, students will explore the relationship between politics and a range of historical and contemporary military operations, from the use of hybrid warfare by small, non-state groups to the threatened use of nuclear weapons.

(1) The classroom-based portion of this program will combine military historical case studies with economics knowledge, analytics, regional expertise, diplomatic skills, language proficiency, and the capacity to apply theory to real-world problems. The curriculum is designed to prepare students with the competencies required to anticipate and adapt to current and future strategic challenges, in order to better inform and assist military and civilian decision-making at all levels. The classroom based portion will consist of four academic courses in a customizable co-curriculum format (university student mix) and four academic courses in a military cohort only format.

(2) The experiential war-gaming portion of the program will have students examine historical and contemporary decision-making to gain a better understanding of how strategy and operations have evolved over time and how levels of warfare link together. Students will be required to conduct a strategic assessment, develop a theory of victory, and execute a war plan.

(3) Staff rides will focus on important issues of leadership and decision-making that have applications well beyond the field of strategic studies. Students, faculty, and guests lecturers will travel to specific locations to examine historical battles, campaigns, and, occasionally, entire wars in order to actively engage in a dialogue with history.

b. Studying under world-class scholars and practitioners at the contracted university, students customize a portion of their course of study from hundreds of functional, regional, and economic courses to advance their expertise and position themselves for continued professional success. Prominent military leaders throughout DoD will be invited to address the military cohort, providing their expertise and prospective on themes of political objective, unity of force, inter-Service and inter-allied cooperation, and leadership.

c. High profile theorists and internationally recognized practitioners will be employed as guest lecturers, exposing students to cutting edge theories and insights that are relevant to the way they understand their Military Service. They will provide students with an unparalleled platform for international engagement with traditional and emerging security partners enrolled in similar graduate level coursework.

2. QUALIFICATIONS FOR ISSTP PARTICIPATION. To qualify for participation in the ISSTP, the applicant must:

a. Be a commissioned officer in the Active Component of a Military Service of the United States.

b. Hold a baccalaureate degree from an accredited degree granting institution.

c. Attain an overall ranking in the top 20 percent, preferably the top 5 percent, of their class through the completion of JPME Phase I coursework and receive a similarly favorable evaluation in the course of at least one key operational assignment.

d. Be in the paygrade of O-4 or above, preferably O-5 promotable or above, and have completed at least 10 years on active duty before the ISSTP AY.

e. Provide or participate in assessments designed to evaluate strategic thinking abilities during the interview selection process. These assessments may include essay drafting, testing, personal interviews, and other methods, as determined by the DASD(FE&T).

f. Apply to the contracted university and be accepted for admission in accordance with the admissions criteria and policies established by the contracted university.

3. APPLYING FOR THE ISSTP.

a. Intent to Apply.

(1) All applicants nominated by their Military Service (primary and alternates) will file an intent to apply via e-mail to the Director, PME, through their Military Department's designated ISSTP POC. Subject line will read: Last Name, First Initial. Middle Initial. INTENT TO APPLY. Example: Jones, A. B. INTENT TO APPLY.

(2) In the body of the e-mail, applicants will provide their first name, middle name, last name, rank, branch of Service, military e-mail, personal e-mail, personal and work contact phone numbers, and an attached one-page statement of purpose explaining the applicant's reasons for seeking admission to the ISSTP.

(3) Applicants will receive a response e-mail with an essay prompt and further instructions on required documents after they send their intent to apply e-mail. If an applicant does not receive a response e-mail within 48 hours, the applicant should contact the Director, PME.

b. Application Transmission.

(1) ISSTP applicants will:

(a) Deliver all application documents, outlined in Paragraph 3.c. of this attachment, to the Director, PME, either by Federal Express Certified Mail, through use of an encrypted (.mil) e-mail account, or hand-delivered in person. Applicants must ensure their application package is complete. Applicants will return answers to the essay prompt to the Director, PME by way of e-mail.

(b) Label any encrypted e-mail as Last Name, First Initial. Middle Initial. ISSTP AY20. Example: Jones A. B. ISSTP AY20.

(2) Personally identifiable information (PII) must be safeguarded.

(a) Encrypted e-mails between “.mil” e-mail accounts are authorized for PII transmission, but applicants must check the block for “Encrypt” under the “Options” tab in Microsoft Outlook.

(b) To minimize loss of PII, social security numbers must be redacted from all material regardless of transmission means. Cutting them out or covering them with whiteout followed by photocopying is appropriate. This requirement applies to all documentation.

c. Application Package. The application package must include:

(1) The one-page essay response to the prompt with one-inch margins, 12 point, Times New Roman font, and single spaced text. If using encrypted e-mail delivery, applicants will place their name and essay title in the header of the page as Last Name, First Initial. Middle Initial. ISSTP AY20 Title. Applicants will save the file the same way. Example: Jones A.B. ISSTP AY20 MY ESSAY.

(2) The two most recent observed fitness reports or equivalent evaluations, scanned in chronological order with most recent on top. If using encrypted e-mail delivery, applicants will name their files as Last Name, First Initial. Middle Initial. ISSTP AY20 fitness report or service equivalent document (e.g., the Officer Evaluation Report). Example: Jones A.B. ISSTP AY20 fitness report.

(3) A copy of the JPME Level I certificate and transcripts from any intermediate level education (ILE) program previously completed. If using encrypted e-mail delivery,

applicants will name their files as Last Name, First Initial. Middle Initial. ISSTP AY20 ILE DIPLOMA. Example: Jones A.B. ISSTP AY20 ILE DIPLOMA.

(4) Copies of all college undergraduate and graduate program transcript(s). Unofficial transcripts are acceptable for application purposes, but if selected to attend the ISSTP, official transcripts are required. If using encrypted e-mail delivery, applicants will name their files as Last Name, First Initial. Middle Initial. ISSTP AY20 TRANSCRIPTS. Example: Jones A.B. ISSTP AY20 TRANSCRIPTS.

(5) At least one written recommendation from their previous ILE in-resident faculty advisor. Non-resident applicants may provide a written endorsement from their reporting senior. If recommendation letters are not available in time for submission, applicants will contact the Director, PME for case-by-case exemption approval. Recommendation forms must be attached in the intent to apply reply e-mail, labelled as Last Name, First Initial. Middle Initial. ISSTP AY20 FACULTY RECOMMENDATION. Example: Jones A.B. ISSTP AY20 FACULTY RECOMMENDATION.

d. Selection Process. In accordance with the guidance and direction provided by ASD(R), the DASD(FE&T) will convene a panel to review applications and recommend selectees for the program to the ASD(R).

(1) Interviews will be scheduled through the applicant's respective Military Service POCs, and will be held at: 4000 Defense Pentagon, Suite 1E537, Washington, D.C. 20301.

(2) For out-of-area applicants, the DASD(FE&T) offices will schedule video teleconferences or phone interviews.

(a) In-person interviews for out-of-area applicants are recommended but not required.

(b) Applicants who prefer a face-to-face interview in Washington, D.C. will be responsible for travel, lodging, and incidental costs.

(3) Interview dates for ISSTP selection panel will be scheduled between January 3 and January 20, as all student applications for the fall semester are due to the contracted university by February 1.

(4) After all interviews are completed, the Office of the DASD(FE&T) will notify the Military Service POCs of the officers selected for the ISSTP by January 21. The ASD(R) will be the final approval authority for all Service nominees.

4. ISSTP STUDENTS. ISSTP students will:



a. Sign an agreement, in accordance with Section 2005 of Title 10, United States Code that they will:

(1) Complete the ISSTP at the contracted university.

(2) Upon graduation, be made available for follow-on assignment(s) that utilize the special knowledge and skills gained through completion of the program.

(3) Serve on active duty for 2 years following completion of the ISSTP. Students who do not graduate from the program, for any reason, will be reassigned in accordance with the policies of his or her respective Military Services.

b. Report for duty to the contracted university's ISSTP office in mid-August to begin 2 weeks of in-processing, orientation, and training courses.

c. After the 2 week orientation period, report to the contracted university for the beginning of the fall semester and remain assigned there until completion of all graduation requirements.

## GLOSSARY

### PART I. ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ASD(R)	Assistant Secretary of Defense for Readiness
AY	academic year
DASD(FE&T)	Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Force Education and Training
DTM	Directive-type memorandum
ILE	intermediate level education
ISSTP	Ike Skelton Strategic Thinkers Program
PII	personally identifiable information
PME	professional military education
POC	point of contact
USD(P&R)	Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness

### PART II. DEFINITIONS

These terms and their definitions are for the purpose of this issuance.

ISSTP. A 32 credit hour, 10-month Master's degree program designed to prepare a small and select group of students for leadership roles demanding long-range critical and strategic thinking skills. This program is unique in its intense focus on the development of interagency, cross-Service strategists who can operate in unknown environments, deal with unanticipated challenges, adapt non-military developments to security challenges, and seek innovative approaches in order to engage civilian and military leaders on the development and conduct of military strategy and operations in the broader context of national policy objectives.

Staff ride. A case study of a previous incident that is conducted on the actual physical site where the incident occurred. A staff ride is an experiential learning method that involves three distinct parts: a preliminary study, a site visit, and a post-visit integration session.