Dear Friends,

Happy holidays from an unseasonably warm West Point! We don’t have snow yet as the cadets head out for a short winter break after final exams. The Academy survived Hurricane Sandy—of course being the only school in the region that did NOT cancel classes. I am proud to report that the Department’s Ultimate Frisbee Team won the fall championship, before Hurricane Sandy caused the Hudson River to overflow and flood all of river courts!

When the cadets return on Wednesday, 2 January 2013, to start the second term, we will build on an incredibly busy fall semester of teaching, mentoring cadets, and conducting research. Under Colonel Ike Wilson’s leadership as the Director of American Politics, Policy, and Strategy (APPS), we took advantage of the presidential election to celebrate democracy and to promote norms of appropriate behavior for officers during a highly politicized campaign season. American politics majors watched the final presidential debate on 21 October, hosted by Mark McKinnon, a former campaign advisor to President George W. Bush and Sarah Palin. On election night, over 600 cadets were in the General Roscoe Robinson Auditorium (which some of you remember as “South Aud.”) to watch the returns roll in and participate in several mini-courses taught by APPS faculty and cadets. The event included seminars on presidential rhetoric, campaign strategy, campaign advertisements, and regional election trends. Cadets earned prizes for guessing the Electoral College count while members of the USMA jazz band played American-themed music. The semester concluded with Mr. Charlie Cook, political analyst and author of the Cook Report, providing post-election commentary for the Department.

In the wake of the election, the Department held the 64th Annual Student Conference on U.S. Affairs (SCUSA) on 7-10 November. The SCUSA 64 theme was very appropriate: “Leading in Lean Times: Assuring Accountability and Assessing American Priorities in an Age of Austerity.” The conference introduced 201 civilian delegates from 108 universities and 31 countries to the U.S. military in a very personal way, as the delegates stayed in the barracks, ate in the mess hall, and interacted with 57 cadet delegates and the 115 member cadet staff. SCUSA delegates attended panel discussions, roundtable sessions, a brilliant Keynote Address by Ms. Susan Eisenhower, and a tremendous panel including Mr. Richard Kidd, BG Tom Cosentino, Dr. Steve Daffron, McDermott Chair of Social Sciences Colonel (retired) Jack Jacobs and Colonel Cindy Jebb. It was amazing to watch Susan Eisenhower describe the important role that cadets and other student delegates will have in shaping the world’s future as she stood in Eisenhower Hall, named for her grandfather, who 100 years ago this month was a yearling cadet sitting in American government class at West Point.

Under Dr. Scott Silverstone’s leadership, we continue to administer the West Point scholarship program supporting several cadets in their own personal development, which frequently leads to post-graduate scholarships. This year, both Cadet Evan Szablowski and
Cadet Kiley Hunkler were awarded Rhodes Scholarships, and over a dozen other cadets continue to compete for scholarships that have not yet been announced.

We are already selecting faculty members mostly from year groups 2006-2008 to start graduate school in 2014. So if you know of great officers for future years who were commissioned in 2007 or later, please have them contact our personnel staff, under the leadership of LTC Tania Chacho, Director of Comparative Politics. You can have them click on the “prospective faculty” link at the left side of our website (http://www.westpoint.edu/sosh/).

The Combating Terrorism Center (CTC) continues to provide world class education, research, and policy advice to current and future leaders, under the leadership of Major Bryan Price, who has returned to the Department to direct the CTC. Our Distinguished Chair, General (retired) John Abizaid, taught an exceptional semester-long course on global strategic thinking. In fact, in one particular 24-hour period in September, General Abizaid, General Stanley McChrystal, General Montgomery Meigs, General David Bramlett, and, to top it off former President George W. Bush—were all here in classes or seminars. Some called this amazing; others said it was just an average day in the Sosh Department.

Beyond General Abizaid’s class, the CTC has continued to produce path-breaking reports including: "Haqqani Network Financing: The Evolution of an Industry," by Mr. Don Rassler with Gretchen Peters; and "Beware of Imitators: Al-Qa’ida through the Lens of its Confidential Secretary," by Dr. Nelly Lahoud. We continue to have opportunities to discuss with policymakers throughout the U.S. government, including General Ray Odierno (Chief of Staff of the Army), the Professional Staff of the House Armed Services Committee, LTG David Perkins (Commanding General of the Combined Arms Center at Fort Leavenworth), LTG Rhett Hernandez (Army Cyber Command Commander), MG John Nicholson, Jr. (82nd Airborne Division Commander), and members of Naval Special Warfare Development Group from Virginia Beach. All CTC publications are available at http://ctc.usma.edu/.

Under the leadership of LTC David Lyle, the Office of Economic and Manpower Analysis (OEMA) has continued to provide timely and thoughtful analysis to Army and Defense Department leaders across a range of strategic human capital management areas. These include military pension and compensation redesign, veterans’ unemployment and transition challenges, and a comprehensive review of senior officer talent management. OEMA has assisted with the piloting of a talent-focused branching paradigm with the Class of 2013, which has improved both cadet satisfaction and better met the needs of the Army by increasing information and improving branch selection.

As I mentioned in my last letter, Colonel Jeff Peterson is on a one-year loan as the Director for the Center for the Army Profession and Ethic (CAPE), with Dr. Dean Dudley doing a great job running the economics stem in his absence. CAPE is a TRADOC Center located at West Point that serves as the Army's proponent for the Army Profession. They are developing a yearlong education and training program on the Army Profession and Ethic called "America's Army--Our Profession." The goal is to inculcate a widely understood, accepted, and internalized meaning of the Army Profession and Ethic. Those of you familiar with Dr. Don Snider's work will be familiar with the concepts as he continues his work as a Senior Fellow for CAPE. Information about CAPE, "America's Army--Our Profession," and other Army Profession resources are available at http://CAPE.army.mil/.
One of the Department’s important but rarely heralded efforts has been for officers to complete their Ph.D.s, usually while they are on the faculty at West Point. This is never easy and takes a concerted effort by the dissertation writer as well as his or her family and colleagues. In the past 3 months we have had a “bumper crop” of doctorates (nearly equaling the number of Sosh babies born). Please join me in congratulating Army’s newest officers who earned their doctorates: Dr. Scott Smitson (Indiana), Dr. John Griswold (University of Washington), Dr. Seth Johnston (Oxford), and Dr. Walt Cooper (Harvard).

And now to conclude, I wanted to let you know that this is my final Department letter. After over 31 years in the Army, nearly 20 years at West Point, and the last 7½ years as Department Head, Ramona and I are deciding to retire and will have a ceremony here at West Point on Friday, 18 January. After some leave (and substantial downsizing of “stuff” accumulated over a career), I will start work at the Army and Air Force Mutual Aid Association (AAFMAA) on 1 April in the Washington, DC, area. I look forward to keeping in touch with many of you and to continue to work to help service members, their families, and our Nation.

After announcing my retirement, I was both surprised and touched when the Department’s holiday party turned into a “mini-Scoff” with a personalized poem by Dr. Ruth Beitler and a hilarious skit/video based on “It’s a Wonderful Life.” As you would expect, it was clever, brilliant, (mostly) in good taste, and the spoof was aptly titled. Teaching cadets, mentoring military faculty, learning from our outstanding civilian faculty, working with the most extraordinarily talented group of Academy Professors and senior civilians, and serving alongside Cindy Jebb as my co-conspirator/Deputy has truly made this “a wonderful life.”

The most important news in this letter is that Colonel Cindy Jebb will assume my duties as Department Head and the Academic Board recently announced that Colonel Suzanne Nielsen will become the new Social Sciences Not-Head. It is only the 9th time since World War II that the Department has changed leadership and, having worked with Cindy as my colleague, friend, and Deputy, I know that the Department’s best days are yet to come!

I look forward to joining Cindy and Suzanne at the Spring Reunion to hear how much the Department has improved since I left. The Spring Reunion will be held on Friday, 19 April, at 6:00 p.m. at the Spates Club at Fort Myer, Virginia. More details will be forthcoming in Cindy’s spring letter but if you ever need information please contact Cindy Jebb, at cindy.jebb@usma.edu or the Department XO, LTC Heidi Urben at heidi.urben@usma.edu.

It has been my greatest professional honor to be the Head of the Department of Social Sciences because of all of the members of the Department, both here in Lincoln Hall and those of you serving throughout the world. Thank you for your support of me and all that the Department has accomplished over these past several years.

With best wishes for happy holidays and farewell from West Point,

Mike Meese
Professor and Head
Department of Social Sciences