

University Professors Preparing Troops for Afghanistan

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Dozens of National Guard officers headed to Afghanistan are training in Springfield, and they're not breaking a sweat. Instead they're hitting the books. It's part of a pilot program found only in Illinois.

Professors from the Springfield and Champaign-Urbana campuses of the University of Illinois are teaching troops everything about Afghanistan they don't learn in basic training. That includes how to address women there, how the school systems work, even an overview of how the country manages its waste and water system.

It's information that helps officers better understand locals, many of whom aid the military. Colonel Gary Schmitt started the program with the help of UIS. He says another plus: the National Guard will be able to get more use out of officers during the short time they're overseas.

"The usual soldier will get over there and at about three months will have their 'aha' moment," says Schmitt. "Well, wouldn't it be more affective if they understood that before they got there?"

Some of the 40 plus officers on the UIS campus today are leaving for Afghanistan as early as next month.

Colonel Schmitt says that while the classes are part of a pilot program, he predicts it will become a regular part of predeployment exercises.

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