



National Emergency Training Center  
16825 S. Seton Avenue  
Emmitsburg, MD 21727-8998

**FEMA**

R5204

Dear National Fire Academy Student:

By now you should have received an email from the National Emergency Training Center (NETC) Admissions Office. This notification indicates your acceptance into the U.S. Fire Administration (USFA), National Fire Academy (NFA) “Exercise of Executive Leadership: Capstone II” (R5204) course.

The course materials for this course are now available in the NFA Online Mediated platform. This web-based system will provide not only the Student Manual (SM), but formal discussions, activities and electronic submission for all course work assignments. You will, or already have, received instructions specific to accessing your NFA Online Mediated account for this specific course. You are expected to bring your laptop or other device capable of completing online education requirements, including completing in-class assignments. Your pre-course assignments will also be available in the NFA Online Mediated classroom.

This is a six-day class that starts on a Sunday at 8:00 a.m. (EST). Subsequent classes will meet daily from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., with evening activities possible.

The NFA classroom environment is computer based. Increased numbers of students and instructors are bringing laptop computers or other electronic devices to campus; you are responsible for the security and maintenance of your equipment. The NFA cannot provide computer software, hardware (which includes disks, printers, scanners, monitors, etc.), or technical support for your device. For your convenience, we do provide surge protector power strips at each classroom table.

If you need additional information related to your course’s content or requirements, please contact Mr. Edward Kensler Jr., training specialist, Leadership and Partnership Branch, at 301-447-1158, or by email at [edward.kenslerjr@fema.dhs.gov](mailto:edward.kenslerjr@fema.dhs.gov). Good luck, and I hope to see you on campus.

Sincerely,

Eriks J. Gabliks, Superintendent  
National Fire Academy  
U.S. Fire Administration

Enclosure

May 2025

## **National Fire Academy Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) Course Materials/Download Instructions**

If you own an electronic device (laptop computer, tablet, etc.) and are familiar with its document reader functions, we are asking you to download the Student Manual (SM) before you travel to class and bring the preloaded device with you.

The **first step** is to download Adobe Acrobat Reader to your device. This will enable you to read and manipulate the course materials. Adobe Acrobat Reader can be used to comment and highlight text in PDF documents. It is an excellent tool for note-taking purposes.

### **For laptops and computers**

Adobe Acrobat Reader can be downloaded from [www.adobe.com/downloads/](http://www.adobe.com/downloads/). It is a free download. Please note that depending on your settings, you may have to temporarily disable your antivirus software.

### **For tablets and other similar hand-held devices**

Adobe Acrobat Reader can be downloaded onto devices such as iPads, Android tablets, and other hand-held devices. The application can be found in the device's application store using the search function and typing in "Adobe Acrobat Reader." Follow the instructions given. **It is a free application.**

After you have successfully downloaded the Adobe Acrobat Reader, please use the following web link to download your SM. You may copy/paste this link into your web browser.

[https://apps.usfa.fema.gov/ax/sm/sm\\_5204.pdf](https://apps.usfa.fema.gov/ax/sm/sm_5204.pdf)

Note: In order to have the editing capabilities/toolbar, the SM needs to be opened with Adobe Acrobat Reader. There should be a function on your device to do this.

If you need assistance, please contact [nfaonlinetier2@fema.dhs.gov](mailto:nfaonlinetier2@fema.dhs.gov).

# *Exercise of Executive Leadership: Capstone II*

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## Pre-course

May 2025

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## **Module 1: Capstone Applied Project**

### **Overview**

Students will upload the Capstone Applied Project (CAP) prior to arrival at the National Fire Academy (NFA). Complete CAP-related information can be found in the CAP Research Guidelines, as well as in “Applications in the Exercise of Leadership: Capstone I” (M5104).

### **Assignment #1: Capstone Applied Project**

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Upload your CAP and the approved research proposal form that you received in Capstone I.

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## Module 2: Capstone Applied Project Presentation

### **Assignment #2: Capstone Applied Project Presentation**

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Upload the slide presentation prior to course arrival. Note: The slides will be used to preload presentations prior to student arrival and are not graded on their own.

Comprehensive guidance for the CAP presentation is in the **Student Manual** (SM):

- **Unit 4: Capstone Applied Project Presentations**
- **Appendix A: Preparing and Delivering the Capstone Presentation**
- **Appendix B: Capstone Presentation Examples**

You should consult the instructions for **Activity 4.1: Capstone Applied Project Presentation**, along with the **Capstone Applied Project Presentation Rubric**, to ensure you understand the scope of the activity and criteria by which you will be graded. Be sure to watch the video embedded in the activity! (See the Harvard Business Review article [“How to Give a Killer Presentation”](#) by Chris Anderson, 2013.)

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## Module 3: Preparation for Gettysburg Staff Ride

**Please read this entire module and SM carefully!** It is very important that, between now and your departure for Emmitsburg, you carefully plan your preparation with these listed requirements, balancing the other pre-course assignments accordingly. (And pack appropriately!)

### What Is a Staff Ride?

The staff ride will occur during the resident “Exercise of Executive Leadership: Capstone II” (EEL: Capstone II) (R5204) course. The activity of a staff ride has military origins dating to the early part of the 20th century. Military officers would travel to selected battlefields, prepared with at least some knowledge concerning the battle to be studied, and would be immersed within the battle by viewing and walking the ground under the guidance of military historians and other officers. Therefore, the purpose of a staff ride is to enjoin the participants in the pursuit of learning (critically) from an important historical event—in this case, the Battle of Gettysburg—with the intent of both integrating and transferring lessons that have value both professionally and personally. The Gettysburg Staff Ride as an element of the EEL: Capstone II course will identify five cases or phases of the Battle of Gettysburg, along with staff who operated there, specifically studying and discussing their use of authority, influence, and decision-making (i.e., the exercise of leadership).

A staff ride is much more than a guided tour of the area in which the event occurred.

Through preparation (this letter and the requirements listed), observation, analysis, and discussion—and in partnership with an interpretive, federally Licensed Battlefield Guide (LBG), the EEL: Capstone II course instructors, and their colleagues—each participant should expect to examine and potentially modify their existing perceptions regarding the use of authority and the behavior of exercising leadership. Since EEL: Capstone II is the Executive Fire Officer (EFO) Program capstone course, this activity should be viewed similarly, as a capstone EFO Program activity.

### Assignment #3: Preparation for Gettysburg Staff Ride

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\*Mark “complete” in the learning management system (LMS); no upload required.

View the movie *Gettysburg*. The movie *Gettysburg* was released in 1993 by New Line Cinema and is available via online streaming platforms. It remains widely available in DVD format at minimal cost. The movie is 4 hours and 14 minutes long. The movie was adapted to screenplay format from the novel *The Killer Angels*, authored in 1974 by Michael Shaara. The author received the Pulitzer Prize for this writing.

The participant is reminded that Shaara's work is historical fiction. Most of the characters existed, and the events that are portrayed occurred, but the movie is an adapted screenplay of the book, which is not completely accurate. A useful way to think about the movie is that it is about 70% historically accurate. However, the movie will provide the EEL: Capstone II participant a fairly accurate review of the battle and provide an introduction of most subjects that will be discussed during the staff ride. **(To separate fact from fiction, it is recommended that you read the book *Gettysburg: A Testing of Courage* by Noah Andre Trudeau before you view the movie.)** While viewing the movie, the following five questions should be contemplated. The participant is encouraged to make notes for each question as they view the movie:

- Heifetz and Linsky (2017) state that “it becomes critically important to communicate in every way possible the reason to sacrifice...people need to know that the stakes are worth it.” Who has done a better job of this—General Robert E. Lee or Colonel Joshua Chamberlain? Explain your answer.
- (Background note: General Lee is the commanding general of the Army of Northern Virginia during the Gettysburg campaign. In essence, he is the chief executive officer (CEO) of his army at Gettysburg, responsible for approximately 75,000 soldiers. Colonel Chamberlain is a regimental officer of the 20th Maine Regiment. He is at the fifth level within the hierarchy of the Union Army of the Potomac at Gettysburg and has direct responsibility for approximately 380 soldiers.)
- Organizational culture was a significant influence on both Lee and Chamberlain. In what ways are the organizational cultures of both the North and South armies similar to those of today's fire and emergency medical services (EMS)?
- Heifetz et al. (2009) recommend that “integrating your ambitions and aspirations” is a way of “staying connected to your purpose.” How does this statement apply to the Union Regimental Commander Colonel J. Chamberlain on the afternoon of July 2 while defending the left of the Union line?
- One can argue that Lee was “connected to his purpose” through his close “integration of his ambitions and aspirations.” Heifetz et al. (2009) explain that “having a sense of purpose is essential to the practice of leadership,” but they warn that “purpose can also become a constraint.” What are some of the common traps that Lee may have fallen into?
- Prior to and during the Battle of Gettysburg, the perceptions of soldiers on both sides were that a great battle was forthcoming and that loss would most likely be significant. Where might the Battle of Gettysburg fall within the Heifetz and Linsky model of the “Zone of Productivity?” Why?

**Required reading:**

*The Killer Angels*. Michael Shaara. 1987. ISBN 13: 9780345348104.

**While not required, it is strongly recommended that you also read the following book as it will support not only the entire story of the Gettysburg campaign, including the Battle of Gettysburg, but also provide additional information that can be used while participating in the case assignment.**

*Gettysburg: A Testing of Courage*. Noah Andre Trudeau. 2002. ISBN 0-06-093186-8.

**Assignment #4: Gettysburg Case Assignment**

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\*Mark “complete” in the LMS; no upload required.

You will be assigned one of five Gettysburg Cases in the LMS. **Review the Case Assignments within the SM prior to arrival.**

Review Activity 3.1: Gettysburg Staff Ride Case Presentation and Activity 3.2: Gettysburg Staff Ride Integration thoroughly.

While the pre-course work is not graded, please ensure that you are prepared because Activity 3.1 **will be graded** when on campus.

**Logistics Planning**

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It is important for your personal well-being and safety that each participant is properly prepared for the staff ride. Depending on the time of year that your EEL: Capstone II course is scheduled, there may be the potential for weather implications that will necessitate the packing of clothing items to accompany you to Emmitsburg.

Consider these aspects:

- For the staff ride, plan on wearing comfortable clothing, particularly in warm weather months. In colder months, consider layering and head protection, along with gloves. Footwear should be comfortable and depending on precipitation at the time of the staff ride, water-resistant shoes or boots may be required.
- If you are particularly or even moderately sensitive to sun, ensure that you bring sunscreen with the SPF rating that you require. Additionally, bring your own bug spray for tick protection.
- While water is normally provided, you may wish to bring a personal container. As you know, in warmer weather this is important to maintain hydration levels.

- Bring an umbrella for your own personal use, along with perhaps a small poncho or water-resistant covering.
- Finally, please prepare for any potential medical needs (e.g., glucose for low blood sugar, an EpiPen for an allergic reaction, etc.).
- If you have mobility issues that may prevent you from negotiating terrain, notify the NFA in advance so this can be accommodated.

Throughout the staff ride, efforts will be made to provide access to public restrooms whenever practical, but please keep in mind that availability of facilities may be very limited, especially on the field. Although the coach used for the ride usually has a bathroom, it is normally considered to be for emergencies. This information is offered in advance to assist in planning for your personal comfort.

In summary, the staff ride is a “rain or shine event” that requires proper preparation. The NFA will do everything possible to enable the staff ride to occur, regardless of the time of year that your EEL: Capstone II course is scheduled. However, as safety and health are of paramount concern, any adverse situation that would place anyone in harm’s way will result in an alternative delivery method.

**Certification of Assignments Completion**  
**“Exercise of Executive Leadership: Capstone II” (R5204)**

I hereby certify that I have read the following in preparation for the Gettysburg Staff Ride, which is an integral element of the EEL: Capstone II course:

*The Killer Angels*. Michael Shaara. 1987. ISBN 13: 9780345348104.

I certify that I have viewed the movie *Gettysburg* (New Line Cinema, 1993).

I certify that I have participated in the preparation of the assigned Battle of Gettysburg field case in preparation (and research) of the assigned questions.

I certify that I will be prepared to cite a brief integration statement at the conclusion of the staff ride.

I certify that I have read and understand the required staff ride logistics and am duly prepared for these.

**X**

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Signature of EEL: Capstone II course participant

Date

***The above certification statement with signature is to be excerpted and electronically sent to the NFA designee no less than 1 week prior to your course start date.***

A failure to comply with this requirement, including the sending of this statement in a timely manner, could result in your removal from the course.