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President's Forum

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PRESIDENT'S FORUM



THROUGHOUT ITS HISTORY, the U.S. Naval War College has continually adapted its educational and research programs to accommodate the shifting international security environment in order to educate the Navy's future leaders effectively. From the introduction of war gaming into the curriculum in the 1880s to the "Turner Revolution" in the mid-1970s, the College has responded to the needs of the service by updating its curriculum and teaching methods and by establishing programs and activities designed not only to keep pace with change but to anticipate it.

Recognizing the need to strengthen the Navy's ability to craft maritime strategy and think both deeply and broadly about warfighting issues, then-Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) Admiral Thomas B. Hayward announced the establishment of the Center for Naval Warfare Studies (CNWS) in 1981. The first head of CNWS, former Navy Under Secretary Dr. Robert J. Murray, saw the Center as a "place where the Navy is asking itself, 'How do the forces fit together: first at the tactical level, then at the theater level, and then worldwide?'"

Mindful of this strong foundation, and recognizing that the Navy was at a critical nexus—operating in a dynamic and increasingly unstable international security environment at a time of unrelenting budgetary pressure—the Center recently conducted a ten-month internal review to examine its current effectiveness in meeting its mandate, and to identify ways in which it could better help the Navy adapt to the challenges it is facing now and will face in the future.

The review was initiated in the fall of 2014. Professor Tom Culora, the acting dean, formed an interdepartmental team of faculty members to examine four key criteria: the degree of success the Center was achieving in its core missions, the effectiveness of both internal and external communications, the efficiency of

the current organizational structure, and the adequacy of resources committed to naval issues. The study team developed a research design that, while primarily qualitative in its approach, applied mixed methods for data collection and analysis that included conducting over eighty internal and external interviews and collecting scores of formal documents and directives.

The result of this effort was a comprehensive review that generated more than seventy relevant findings and made twenty direct recommendations that provided a foundation for the Center's dean and department chairs to examine as they chart the course for the organization over the next several years. A systematic review and discussion within this group of leaders revealed three enduring issues they believe need to be considered for the Center to remain relevant and effective. First, they identified the need for effective and active communication both within the Center and, equally important, across the greater naval enterprise to leverage the full potential of the institution to influence and inform key decisions about naval strategy and operations. Second, the Center needs to maintain a balance perpetually between its research activities and gaming conducted in response to outside tasking / demand signals, on the one hand, and activities designed to generate independent analysis and creative thinking, on the other hand. By doing so, the Center not only responds to the immediate needs of the Navy but also has the "bandwidth" to recognize emerging trends and issues, so as to enable it to conduct research and inquiry to *anticipate* challenges, not just *respond* to them. Lastly, there was recognition of the natural competition between the need to both address near-term challenges and pressing situations that demand attention *now* and devote time to anticipating, identifying, and exploring *future* operational and strategic questions.

Beyond these three enduring issues, the study team's other findings represented both challenges and opportunities for the Center. Among the key opportunities—in the form of strengths—identified were the strong, diverse, and widely respected faculty; the reputation of the Center for academic and research integrity; and the recognition of the value of independent and anticipatory research. But ongoing challenges were identified as well, including the difficulty of fully and effectively communicating the research and gaming activities of the Center to outside organizations and stakeholders; the absence of research unity and a long-term strategy; the lack of coverage in several key issue areas, both regional and functional; and the ever-present challenge of sustaining research quality that is attendant on research organizations such as CNWS. Underpinning all of these challenges was a growing concern that the critical support that enables this rich source of research and analysis was under both bureaucratic and budgetary pressure that could threaten the effectiveness, efficiency, quality, and

quantity of the research produced by the faculty, not only in CNWS but across the College at large.

In the months following the delivery of the study results to College leadership nearly all of the recommendations have been adopted in one form or another, including some additional recommendations from the department chairs. Several responses to key recommendations were initiated immediately, including the following:

- The development and publication of an annual research plan, coupled with a yearbook to provide a compendium of all the work done by the Center in the preceding year. At the time of this writing, the first edition of this document is scheduled for release in the fall of 2015. We anticipate that future plans/yearbooks will be developed earlier in the calendar year via a process that will more fully consult and consider the needs of key stakeholders and staffs.
- Improvement of both internal and external communication that goes beyond the publication of the research plan and yearbook, to include internal and external presentations of research findings; a CNWS “road show” that may become part of a larger College-wide outreach program and periodic workshops; and other events at the College designed to deliver research results and obtain feedback on that work more effectively.
- Establishment of a Center-wide research consultation and assessment process among all faculty members that creates a dialogue and encourages critical examination of key research efforts as a means of assessing the overall fidelity and quality of the research produced and released by the Center.
- A structural change within the Center that merges the Strategic Research Department with the Warfare Analysis and Research Department to improve collaboration and improve efficiency. This merger enables a talented group of topically diverse faculty members who apply a variety of research methodologies and approaches to collaborate more effectively on a wide range of research projects and initiatives. This improves the potential to combine divergent research into a holistic view of the strategic and operational issues facing the fleet across the spectrum of conflict in both the near and far terms.
- Lastly, based on the internal review and the subsequent development of the research plan, efforts are under way to close recognized gaps in the research coverage by internally adjusting the focus of a few faculty members on the basis of their demonstrated expertise, while adding new faculty members targeted to fill these gaps when enabled by faculty retirements and departures. Developing the intellectual capital of the Center is perhaps the key

mechanism for ensuring a vibrant, agile, and forward-leaning organization. The follow-on to these faculty additions and adjustments is the development of a more comprehensive human resources plan that will outline priorities and identify opportunities with the most valuable asset the Center possesses—its people.

These recommendations, along with several others, are being implemented by the College to sustain and improve support to CNO, the OPNAV staff, and the fleet; to provide a measure of “headroom” to enable organizational agility; and to respond to demand signals as received on future needs of the fleet.

History shows that good organizations respond to challenges and opportunities; but the best organizations anticipate and actively adapt to change in their environments and to the shifting uncertainty of an unstable world. The initial motivation behind CNWS’s internal review was to provide a deeper understanding of the organization and the environment so that thoughtful and targeted adaptive change could be initiated to improve the organization—and this goal was accomplished. As the dean of CNWS stated at the review’s conclusion, “At the end of the day, the internal review provided the leadership, faculty, and staff within CNWS with a vehicle to begin a sustained and open dialogue about what, how, and why we do what we do.” I am convinced that this dialogue will continue in the coming months and years as the Center for Naval Warfare Studies shapes its research, gaming, and analytical work—ultimately contributing to the mission of the Naval War College as it provides support to CNO and our Navy at large.

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