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## President's Forum

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## PRESIDENT'S FORUM

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### *Education Engine*

CONSIDER SOME RECENT HEADLINES: “The Navy of the Future Wants to Use Lasers and Superfast Electromagnetic Railguns Instead of Shells and Gunpowder” (Aspen Institute, *Five Best Ideas of the Day*, 10 February 2015, [aspen.us/](http://aspen.us/)); “Massive Computing Power and Better Tools Are Making It Harder to Hide Submarines” (*ibid.*, 19 February 2015); and “ISIS Ranks Grow as Fast as U.S. Bombs Can Wipe Them Out” (*Daily Beast*, 3 February 2015, [www.thedailybeast.com/](http://www.thedailybeast.com/)). Now imagine what headlines might read in the year 2025. What will technology bring to the battlefield? What will the enemy look like? On how many dimensions will we have to fight? A recent CNN article claiming that “everything you know about the ‘future of war’ is wrong” (23 February 2015, [www.cnn.com/](http://www.cnn.com/)) suggests there is no way to know.

At the Naval War College, we believe you train for the known and educate for the unknown. Thus, we prepare our graduates for the unknown and the complex with an intensive core educational program that fosters new habits of mind and cultivates the ability to reason critically. The core is the “engine” of the Naval War College, fueled by three dynamic departments and their world-class faculties of officers, professional academics, and practitioners.

The College is unique in that the same faculty teaches two distinct accredited graduate degrees. Intermediate Level Course (ILC) students earn MAs in Defense and Strategic Studies through the Raymond A. Spruance program, and Senior Level Course (SLC) students earn MAs in National Security and Strategic Studies via the Chester W. Nimitz program. The two programs provide Joint Professional Military Education phases I and II certification, respectively, and both integrate U.S. and foreign officers and interagency civilians. The core curriculum of each program is expertly delivered by the three departments.

The Joint Military Operations Department investigates the theory and practice of operational art and design across the range of military operations and familiarizes students with the Joint Operation Planning Process and the Navy Planning Process. Students tackle unstructured, complex problems such as disaster relief after tsunamis and earthquakes, military responses to failed critical states, and conflict with peer competitors. The department prepares students to lead operational planning teams at the combatant-commander and joint-task-force levels while also developing the joint attitudes and perspectives essential to modern war.

The National Security Affairs Department offers an interdisciplinary approach to security studies, an approach in which students wrestle with the dynamic challenges facing modern leaders and institutions. ILC students focus on the theater-strategic challenges concerning combatant commands, while SLC students engage with global and national strategic-level issues. All students gain invaluable perspective on the complexities of the interagency and decision-making environment through three parallel subcourses: Security Strategies, Policy Analysis, and Leadership Concepts. I recently attended the final exercises and was highly impressed with how our students presented their original ideas and analyses to panels of distinguished experts from combatant commands and Washington—not to mention to their peers from across the services and the interagency realm.

The Strategy and Policy Department educates strategically minded leaders skilled at critical analysis in today's complex security environment. This course challenges students to master a wide range of classical and contemporary strategic concepts and includes various landmark thinkers on strategy and war—among others, Sun Tzu, Thucydides, Clausewitz, and Mao. Students also absorb classic works of sea power and assess modern concepts in the laboratory of history via numerous case studies. With intensive reading and writing requirements in a small-seminar environment, students develop their own original and cogent analyses of strategic decisions. The intermediate- and senior-level courses on strategy are considered the very best of their kind and serve as models for programs at major universities, such as Yale.

The engine of the core curriculum is “supercharged” by an Electives Program accounting for 20 percent of each student's academic experience. Students select from over a hundred course topics, such as modern China, cyber security, Winston Churchill, the literature of war, and other subjects capitalizing on the faculty's diverse expertise. Students may also pursue group advanced research projects, including the Halsey Alfa and Bravo courses, which focus on tactical and operational war-gaming scenarios important to the fleet. Two special programs extend the College program from ten to thirteen months for some students: the

recently expanded Maritime Advanced Warfighting School, which creates operational planners now in high demand in the fleet, and the new Advanced Studies in Naval Strategy program, which offers a deep dive into critical principles of strategy. All of these elements combine with the core curriculum to develop the most important weapon system of all—the mind.

Our great gift to students is a new life of the mind. I receive direct and clear evidence from our graduates, such as this comment from a recent survey: “[The Naval War College] provided me with historical context and critical thinking skills that have benefited me every day of my current assignment as senior advisor to a combatant commander.” Other graduates have reported, “For the first time I find that I have had major shifts in my thinking,” and “I am now looking at what is happening in the world through a different lens.” None of this happens without a world-class faculty, one capable of transforming the minds—and thus the lives—of the men and women who will chart our course into the future.

Since taking command last year, I have been particularly impressed with the dedication and impact of our faculty. They commit long hours to students while constantly revising and seamlessly orchestrating the fundamentally different ILC and SLC curricula. Our active-duty professors come from all services and from operational and joint assignments and thus offer compelling relevance. Our civilian professors provide the deep expertise and continuity essential to program development, and they make themselves extraordinarily relevant in their respective fields. Just within the past few months, for example, Naval War College professors have published books with such major academic presses as the Oxford University Press and Stanford University Press, as well as articles in key journals like *Joint Force Quarterly* and *International Theory*. They also enjoy direct connections to senior leaders, including in-person briefings for the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Chief of Naval Operations on matters involving Asian security strategy. Yet their first love is, and must be, teaching and challenging our students.

Admiral James G. Stavridis has often observed that twenty-first-century warfare is “brain on brain.” He’s right. Well-educated leaders are the lone constant we can create for an unknown future, and the Naval War College’s “engine”—our core program fueled by outstanding faculty—is doing just that.

P. GARDNER HOWE III

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President, Naval War College*