

2020

President's Forum

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The U.S. Naval War College

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Rear Admiral Shoshana Chatfield is the fifty-seventh President of the U.S. Naval War College and a career naval helicopter pilot. A native of Garden Grove, California, she graduated from Boston University in 1987 with a bachelor of arts in international relations and French language and literature. She received her commission through the Naval Reserve Officers Training Corps in 1988 and earned her wings of gold in 1989. Chatfield was awarded the Navy's Political/Military Scholarship and attended the Kennedy School of Government, receiving a master in public administration from Harvard University in 1997. In 2009, the University of San Diego conferred on her a doctorate of education in leadership studies.

PRESIDENT'S FORUM



AUGUST MARKED the passage of my first year as Naval War College President. As the fifty-seventh officer to undertake the stewardship of this historically important and consistently relevant institution, I find myself constantly looking back at the strategic moves made and lessons learned by my predecessors going back 136 years. The challenges that these leaders considered as the nation faced times of war and peace have been many, and I believe the situation we have faced, and continue to address, during the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic is similarly significant at the operational, intellectual, and emotional levels. The thoughts that follow are not intended to be a litany of what we have *lost* as the result of pandemic-driven changes but instead are targeted toward a necessary change of mind-set as our College identifies how we as an institution of higher learning will forge a stronger organization and contribute to an enhanced learning culture throughout the Navy that will serve us well as we move through this pandemic and beyond.

In an operational sense, in August 2019 the members of the class of 2020 crossed the College's quarterdeck with enthusiasm and an eagerness to learn that was equal to that of any of the tens of thousands of students who preceded them. They were embraced warmly by our world-class faculty and staff and together formed a company of maritime, military, and international scholars unlike that anywhere else in the world. The cacophony of different languages, professional jargon, and occasionally esoteric terminology filled the classrooms and common spaces with an electric vibrancy. The face-to-face interactions, including the inevitable exchanges arising from good-natured rivalries, were a pleasure to behold.

Then, just past the midyear point, we took drastic but necessary measures to control the spread of the coronavirus, in effect setting "Condition Zebra" (to

use shipboard damage-control terminology) across the campus, isolating most students and faculty and staff members from each other. Our challenge then was to convey as much educational and professional development as possible within these new constraints and within the existing academic calendar.

Once the need for drastic protective measures became clear, our faculty members had to manage an abrupt transition from the physical to the virtual classroom during the term. While some had taught online previously, all needed to learn quickly to navigate our available online platforms to create engaging virtual seminars (synchronous online education). Lectures moved from the auditorium to the small screen, with students able to watch on their own time (asynchronous online education) as they navigated balancing their classes with new home responsibilities as their children's schools closed. Small-group discussions transitioned from groups of students surrounding a physical whiteboard (in-person education) to using online breakout rooms, with students collaborating on virtual whiteboards and virtual documents (synchronous real-time education). The faculty began using blogs, wikis, and online journals and discussion boards so that conversations and critical thinking could occur outside of seminar time (asynchronously). End-of-term surveys reported that, while everyone missed the physical classroom, students and faculty members alike agreed that the unfamiliar environment and rapid transition were not barriers to producing high-quality learning experiences.

During the summer 2020 intersessional period, the faculty focused its developmental efforts on learning more about remote teaching. Faculty members participated in workshops and webinars on teaching online, including a session on remote war gaming. Twenty-four faculty members from across the College joined a Teaching Online Learning Community to discuss techniques and approaches to creating engagement and community; building effective online courses; and technology, tools, and resources. They shared their recommendations in a panel discussion prior to the start of the fall term, ensuring a cross-departmental exchange of ideas and tips. As a result, many faculty members adapted their courses, adopted new technology platforms, and developed innovative approaches that incorporate greater levels of student-to-student collaboration and practical exercises into their seminars. Many faculty members have reported that the insights and changes of the last few months will have permanent, positive impacts on their teaching even after they return to the physical classroom.

Just as the teaching faculty learned to operate in a different manner, so did our research and gaming faculty. Our team at the Center for Naval Warfare Studies (CNWS) used the opportunities that the restricted COVID-19 environment presented to find creative ways to continue conducting research and gaming. Early on, CNWS scheduled a modest workshop for academics and practitioners to look

at COVID-19 in the Arctic. The effort steadily grew in size and complexity, and ultimately more than seven hundred registered! The Stockton Center for International Law also capitalized on the availability of experts and their willingness to engage virtually on a variety of international law topics. The center conducted several virtual workshops that included some of the field's most influential experts—something that is often more challenging, if not impossible, to do in person. Finally, CNWS's War Gaming Department worked closely with OPNAV and fleet staffs to experiment with conducting games, including classified ones, via virtual means. Our team continually is identifying and learning methods, protocols, and technical requirements to improve the fidelity and expand the scope of virtual gaming. This is important in the current COVID-19 restricted environment but also for developing and executing virtual games going forward, regardless of the environment.

The national media have reported frequently on the negative impact that the current level of isolation can have on the well-being of individuals of all ages. Even isolation in small family groups can create anxiety, lack of motivation, and a general malaise. To counteract these negative effects, the College faculty and staff aggressively embraced software platforms such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and Blackboard to bridge the gulf between the College and our extended academic/professional family. Frequent live “town hall” meetings routinely gathered hundreds from within our College community, and by using the available real-time chat features the participants not only heard the topics College leaders were discussing but also interacted by submitting questions. Since the participants could identify others who were logged on simultaneously, many one-to-one comments also were facilitated, thus creating a shared experience similar to the random hallway conversations that are so valuable in team building.

We also made a conscious effort to reach out to the spouses and significant others of our students through a tailored Issues in National Security (INS) lecture series. These lectures featured some of the College's premier scholars addressing many of the same topics that resident students encounter in their graduate-level work. We then augmented these lectures by conducting Family Discussion Group (FDG) meetings by partnering with on-base organizations and services to lead informational sessions at the conclusion of each scholarly program. Those leading the FDG sessions have included the directors and managers of the Fleet and Family Support Center; the Morale, Welfare, and Recreation Department; and our local health-care facility. By adding these discussions onto the INS lectures we were able to connect further with members of our extended community who would have lingered in the physical auditorium after the conclusion of the academic program. Once again, the chat function facilitated two-way communication. During the prepandemic portion of the 2019–20 academic year these events

were conducted in person on our Newport campus. It has been interesting to note that overall participation has more than doubled since adopting the online approach. For this series and for other conferences and symposia, we will plan to keep online access an active part of our learning and outreach activities even after the current crisis subsides. The 2020–21 INS lecture schedule has been expanded to include eighteen lectures and FDG sessions spread over the full academic year.

This global pandemic has shown us once again that our military organizations must remain agile and prepare and develop our people continuously to be able to surge forward as new challenges arise. COVID-19 could have been viewed as an obstacle to completing academic year (AY) 19–20, but we chose—and must continue to choose throughout AY 20–21—to view it as a game changer in our business of education. Our deans, directors, faculty, and staff continue to look for ways that technology can enhance our programs that will endure long after 2020. For example, our College of Maritime Operational Warfare has increased education opportunities for students who cannot travel to Newport, our Center for Naval Warfare Studies has initiated distributed war gaming, and our College of Distance Education now conducts virtual graduations. In the fall of 2019, I never imagined that by March 2020 we would be 100 percent virtual, yet in June I presided over a virtual graduation for more than five hundred resident students and another 1,400 distance-education students from around the globe. As we look to capture even more gains that we are developing through our response to COVID-19, we also can begin to envision a new normal, one that integrates new technologies and education modes and optimizes our students' learning opportunities when they are available, wherever they are. I could not be prouder of the Naval War College's dedicated men and women who have answered the call so effectively and truly have excelled in answering the challenges 2020 has levied upon us.



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