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President's Forum

Shoshana Chatfield Rear Admiral, U.S. Navy, President, Naval War College
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



A Call for Data-Driven Decisions

AS ACADEMIC YEAR 2022-23 enters its final trimester, I want to share some thoughts about a significant opportunity for this institution that we will be addressing in the months and years ahead.

Colleagues within the national-security arena often refer to us as “the nation’s premier war college.” Our College earned this reputation through nearly 140 years of superior scholarship, strategic and operational research, and professional executive development on our historic Newport campus and throughout 109 years of highest-quality and relevant distance education.

Yet while we take immense pride and comfort in looking back at past accomplishments, it is time to engage in an intense process of data-driven self-evaluation and preparation to ensure that our voyage plan prepares us for both foreseeable and unknowable challenges. Our Navy is encouraging such inward-looking analyses fleet-wide by developing a mind-set called Get Real, Get Better, the subject of my President’s Forum in the Autumn 2022 *Review* (volume 75, number 4). We must pay particular attention to the global military and political operating environments to determine what is changing and how we must assess and modify our programs and processes to incorporate the new demand signals. In the following paragraphs, I will describe how this process will occur here in Newport and the steps that will position the College to answer the questions that objectively will inform our collective future.

The primary responsibility of all leaders is to understand the missions, functions, and tasks assigned to their organizations and to measure the effectiveness of all efforts to achieve those desired outcomes. Some environments lend themselves to straightforward assessments. For example, it seems easier to think about standards, goals, cost drivers, and value in an industrial context,

in which the accumulation of raw materials and the costs associated with processing those materials into finished products result in clear-cut measures of effectiveness. However, institutions in the naval-education enterprise must design assessment tools to fit our unique educational and research outcomes and organizational construct. Such complex endeavors in graduate education and cutting-edge research require a change in our mind-set and organization regarding our business practices and the modernization of our information-management systems.

In 2021, we worked collaboratively to develop and publish the *U.S. Naval War College Strategic Plan 2022–2027*. In 2022, we established a strategic-plan-implementation framework for engaging stakeholders across the College. Our staff and faculty have worked together to identify and improve internal business practices to support our team better. We engaged the Office of Personnel Management to assist us in optimizing our organizational structure and in understanding where we have workflow and personnel mismatches. In 2023, we welcomed our first Chief Inclusion and Diversity Officer, who will support our creative, collaborative, and high-performing team. We have initiated an internal search for an Associate Provost for Academic Services, one for Research, and one for Outreach and Engagement to enable us to move more quickly in developing processes and goals to accomplish our desired institutional changes.

Since then, we also have discovered where we have gaps in our data. If we are to make data-driven decisions, we must set standards and goals and measure our efforts in relation to them. For example, our robust survey processes in our resident degree program are not extended or duplicated across all our educational programs. An existing program for collecting data about our short-course attendance and completion is underused. As we looked deeper, we discovered that the College's current student-information systems must be upgraded to meet higher-education standard practices to support us across the scope of our missions. Therefore, we are working with the Naval Postgraduate School to select and invest in a state-of-the-art student-information system to provide each institution with a modern, reliable, integrated source of retrievable data. And this year, we will hire a Chief Data Officer.

These moves will underpin innovations in Navy professional military education and warfighter development directed by the Chief of Naval Operations and Secretary of the Navy. The appropriate investments across the naval-education enterprise will enable each institution to be responsive to calls for short courses, badging and certification, and stackable degrees. Drawing the best results from such an investment will require a dedicated implementation team to accomplish the migration, as well as training of faculty and staff across the College to understand how to condition the data and achieve full functionality.

To inform today's decision makers and educate tomorrow's leaders, we need to know ourselves better than anyone else does. Accurate records and assessments must be readily available when the institution is called upon to realign its priorities to address emerging threats. Suppose this truly is the "decade of danger" for our nation and allies. In that case, our war-college community must become keenly interested in developing our ability to work collaboratively across our own institution and to integrate our capabilities with those of the other higher-education institutions in the naval-education enterprise. Access to data will allow us to refine our organizational structure and human-capital strategy with enough fidelity to pivot adroitly if and when necessary to address changing priorities and emerging challenges.

Our new Data Committee has developed criteria for hiring the Chief Data Officer. In an era in which the industry standard is a "data lake," our outdated, manual data-gathering efforts limit us to barely adequate and disconnected "data puddles." Our limited technological tools are inadequate. Our Naval Education Enterprise Chief Information Officers are collaborating on designing a new data architecture for naval-education flagship institutions that references higher-education best practices and uses data-driven systems to manage crucial tasks such as student and curriculum support, human-resource management, and facilities maintenance and modernization. Investing in data infrastructure is an opportunity for our Naval War College to highlight current success and to extend our legacy.

Over the past three and a half years at the helm of this great institution, I continuously have grown more interested in and curious about ways of accurately representing and assuring our College history, operations, and impacts worldwide. Evaluating our institution's ability to deliver war-fighting advantage with appropriate metrics and outcomes to our customers and stakeholders will only become more important. We have work to do to translate our requirements and achievements into Get Real, Get Better language.

I am amazed daily by our team's energy, commitment, and innovation, and our resilience and connection to the mission are evident. However, now we are called to view our great College through a more analytic lens—one that will provide us with the information we need to make reasoned decisions in a time of change.



SHOSHANA S. CHATFIELD

Rear Admiral, U.S. Navy

President, U.S. Naval War College