

Air War College (AWC)—The Way Ahead

Background

Carrying out the Air War College mission to educate senior military and civilian teammates to serve as critical and strategic thinkers able to serve as national security senior leaders requires a constant process of adaptation to respond to a rapidly changing security environment as well as higher level-guidance. This paper outlines AWC's current program as well as some of the initiatives we are taking to make sure that the Air Force's Senior Developmental Education program continues to adapt and provide the best senior level PME in the world.

Core Resident Course

The Air War College resident program includes two foundational courses, one focusing on strategy and one on leadership. The strategy course is rooted in a rigorous, historically-based study of armed conflict and the dynamics that emerge out of the violent interaction of opposing wills. It examines strategy and warfare theories of classic and contemporary thinkers and dissects historical case studies to produce graduates who can think critically and creatively about the art of war. The leadership course builds upon the past leadership experiences of our students in order to develop and hone the additional skills our graduates require to lead and command successfully at the strategic level. It explores key themes including the strategic environment, wicked problems, in extremis leadership, mission command, organizational culture, and innovation. The program also includes a series of courses that equip our graduates to assess national, regional, and global security issues. These courses appraise today's complex, interdependent, and dynamic international system; analyze how national security policies are developed and implemented in an interagency environment; and evaluate how the national instruments of power can best be integrated to respond to current and future security challenges. Later courses prepare graduates to present innovative military force options which achieve military objectives in support of national policy. As the Air War College, in our study of potential conflict with other great powers we analyze the unique attributes and interdependence of the Air, Space & Cyber domains and the role of Airpower in joint, multi-domain operations. Our graduates are prepared to utilize operational design and the Joint Planning process to employ the military instrument of power to achieve national strategic objectives in theater strategies, campaigns, and major operations. The program concludes with two capstone events, a Secretary of the Air Force sponsored National Security Forum and a Global Challenge wargame that challenges students to apply concepts learned throughout the academic year to a realistic but extremely demanding global set of problems.

While the AWC resident program already supports many of the key tenets identified by the National Defense Strategy as areas of focus for PME (Great Power Competition, Lethality, Ingenuity, Warfighting, Technology, Mission Command, international partnerships), as part of our continuing review and curriculum updating process, each of our core courses and departments are re-examining their courses to more deeply align with the Secretary's guidance and ensure AWC graduates are best prepared to succeed at the strategic level. Global Integration

and Dynamic Force Employment are among other current relevant topics for which the Air War College is committed to further developing and integrating content and instruction in the curriculum.

The **Foundations of Strategy** course provides students with key strategic concepts and analytical frameworks so they can evaluate, through the use of historical case studies, how strategies have been and are developed, implemented, and adjusted at the national and theater levels. The course fosters an historical mindset that embraces the importance of context and circumstance, fosters an ability to dissect complex political-military situations, examines similarities and differences between the past and present, and cultivates the mind to ask disciplined, critical questions. This course is evolving to focus more on great power conflict, without forgetting the hard-earned lessons of the last 17 years of war, and to provide a more direct focus on how technological developments, especially in the cyber, space and nuclear realms, can impact the strategic context. In keeping with Air University's emphasis on building new, cost-effective, and adaptable war games, this course is in the process of developing a "War in the Baltics" exercise that would require students to derive and assess alternative strategies for deterring and responding to Russian aggression in the Baltics. It would include Russia's use of a low-yield nuclear weapon, cyber-attacks, and use of "little green men."

The **Strategic Leadership and the Profession of Arms** course emphasizes intellectual leadership and military professionalism in the art and science of warfighting via instructional periods (IPs) devoted to understanding the strategic environment (VUCA), strategic thinking (critical, creative and systems thinking), self-awareness, ethics, accountability, vision, mission command, and providing advice/dissent. Historical examples are used to contextualize the challenges senior leaders face. In academic year 19, this course introduced two full-length book examinations (Team of Teams by retired Gen. McChrystal and Duty by former Secretary Gates) designed to increase students' depth of understanding of the key strategic leadership competencies demanded by the NDS, including the art and science of warfighting, new technology and techniques, independence of action, and building trust/interoperability and Civ-Mil relations. This course is also exploring the creation of a strategic leadership innovation exercise designed to harness new, "out-of-the-box" thinking to create increased options for success. They are also looking at how to better incorporate design thinking in the course to connect it to our Theater Strategy and Campaigning course.

The 2018 NDS also, "acknowledges an increasingly complex global security environment, characterized by overt challenges to the free and open international order... [that] require a clear-eyed appraisal of the threats we face." It "requires the seamless integration of multiple elements of national power—diplomacy, information, economics, finance, intelligence, law enforcement, and military..." These topics are covered in three courses presented by the Department of International Security Studies, which educates senior leaders to understand the political, interagency, and international context of the IIIM environment and to effectively operate within it. We accomplish this this by focusing on strategic level analytical frameworks that enable senior leaders to understand national and international security environments and to effectively apply these frameworks and instruments of power to past, present, and future security

challenges in the pursuit of US national interests. The **National Security Decision Making (NS-DM)** course educates senior leaders on the geo-strategic and policy-making factors that influence senior joint military and civilian professionals when formulating and implementing American national security policy in the inter-agency environment. NS-DM allows students to understand how national security policy is developed and made at the highest level, and the ways in which organizations and leaders make decisions about foreign policy. We do this by: 1) evaluating how the U.S. uses the instruments of power to operate in the international environment; 2) analyzing the processes by which security policy is made; and 3) synthesizing concepts through case studies. To better align with the NDS, this course has been designed to focus explicitly on giving “best military advice” as part of the broader national security decision-making process. The **Regional Security** course educates senior leaders by providing them with an analytical framework that enables them to describe the role that politics, military, economic, and cultural factors (including societies and religion) play in shaping security policies in a region or country. Regional Security then provides students with on-the-ground exposure to these regions and enables them to evaluate US security policies in light of PMEC factors. To better align with the NDS, this course is putting greater emphasis on great power competition and the importance of mil-to-mil relations in all the regions studied. The **Global Security** course educates senior leaders to evaluate today’s complex, interdependent, and dynamic international system and to analyze how it affects international, regional, and national security and future conflict. The course assesses how power politics, globalization, state strength, and nationalism influence international security on a comparative regional basis. It also examines the roles state and non-state actors play in addressing key issues that shape the international security environment. After three thematic instructional periods at the beginning of the course (power politics, states, and globalization), the first two country-focused sessions will be on China and Russia. The course then highlights great power competition with China and Russia in each region studied (e.g. Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, Middle East, Central Asia, South Asia, Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia, and Europe).

The **Airpower** course examines how Joint Airpower (Air, Space & Cyber) as part of a joint and multinational force, will respond to the challenges of conflict in the future. It emphasizes a multi-domain approach (creating & exploiting cross-domain synergy) to warfare by focusing on the unique characteristics of, and also the interdependence of, the Air, Space & Cyber Domains, today, and into the future. The course themes include thinking about the art and science of war, emerging technologies and operational concepts, conflict with peer competitors, countering joint and multi-domain Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD) strategies, and developing a force (and leaders) for the future. This is our newest core course and was explicitly added to the curriculum to give a future technology and future great power conflict focus.

The **Theater Strategy & Campaigning** course objective is to evaluate theater strategies, campaigns and major operations that achieve national strategic goals across the range of military operations. This is accomplished through the application of operational design methodology and the Joint Planning Process. Recent changes to the course now have students developing operational approaches for a EUCOM Theater Campaign Plan and contingency plan focused on countering Russian influence and aggression in the Baltics. This course is also exploring a

reorientation of its major exercises to an Indo-PACOM Theater Campaign Plan and a contingency plan focused on Chinese influence and potential aggression.

The NDS argues that, "The creativity and talent of the American warfighter is our greatest enduring strength, and one we do not take for granted." The **research program** is the most direct way in which we tap the experience of our student senior leaders to address problems facing the United States, as they apply their knowledge and refine their abilities to seek solutions and convey them in elegant and applicable ways. AU-chartered **Research Task Forces** will continue to solicit and address pressing concerns of the Air Force and DoD, while we are increasing the number of Faculty-led Analysis Groups (FLAGs) to gain the greatest synergy between student interest and subject matter expertise on key strategic issues. Student papers are promoted back to the organizations whose questions they answer, and circulated through professional publications.

Special Programs

The Air War College has developed one and is in the process of developing a second special program to provide a more "tailored" educational process to take better advantage of the strengths inherent in parts of our student body. The **Grand Strategy Seminar** is a voluntary program designed for our most academically prepared and ambitious students. The GSS offers a course of study for officers seeking a deeper understanding of the development and implementation of grand strategy. We are also in the process of developing a new **Joint Warrior Studies Seminar** to take the students who already come to us well-versed in the fundamentals of design and warfighting to the graduate level of knowledge in sustained campaigning, Joint Planning and Design. These programs meet all the same requirements as the rigorous core program discussed above, but take advantage of specialized talent and expertise already inherent in the student body to provide a deeper focus in the key areas of strategy and warfighting.

Conclusion

As the overall Air University paper stresses, the joint force faces complex challenges in the competitive world of the twenty-first century. As PME professionals, the Air War College is committed to constantly improve our methods, practices, and partnerships to keep the force perpetually ready to learn, adapt, make decisions, and lead with integrity. While there is no shortage of ideas of what PME could do, the MECC should play a key role in delineating the key areas PME must focus on. PME cannot be all things to all people, and the MECC should help clarify for the Chairman and the Secretary the things PME, and only PME, can and must do.