

PRESIDENT'S FORUM



Keeping Sights on Targets

SHOOTING IS A core SEAL skill. Looking back at my early years, I remember spending a lot of time—at a lot of ranges—to build the ability to shoot quickly and accurately. And from the very beginning, I remember the emphasis our training cadre put on the *importance of feedback* to improve shooting skills, whether through the careful analysis of the shot groups on the target at a flat range to improve sight alignment and sight picture or through the employment of steel targets for immediate auditory and visual cues during reactive shooting drills.

Later in my career, as focus shifted from the tactical to the operational level of war, the importance of feedback remained constant. During these years, I gained a great appreciation for the importance of assessments as a form of operational feedback in the Plan-Direct-Monitor-Assess cycle. Absolutely critical to effective military operations in a complex, dynamic operational environment, the assessment effort is key to understanding not only if you're "hitting what you're shooting at" but more importantly, if you're "shooting at the right targets."

Today, as my focus has shifted again, this time from the operational world to the Naval War College, it's fascinating to see the continued criticality of feedback in our efforts. We are a multifaceted graduate institution chartered to provide professional military education to our talented and committed students; the desired outcome of our efforts is the creation of a cadre of well-informed critical thinkers who are prepared to address creatively the challenges they will face as military leaders in the decades that follow their graduation. In this Forum, I'd like to reflect on how the Naval War College employs its extensive program of internal and external assessment to ensure we are "on target" with our educational efforts (we'll look at our research, gaming, and analysis efforts in a future Forum).

Internal Assessments. Our faculty continually revises and updates our academic programs, developing new case studies as needed to maintain focus on current issues and to incorporate findings from emerging scholarly research. Many of our faculty members are actively engaged with leaders and operators from across the Department of Defense, and our subject-matter experts travel widely around the globe to maintain situational awareness over the full national-security spectrum. Since we value the opinion of our very professional student body, we gather feedback from our students as they arrive, as the classes progress, at the end of each term, and through alumni surveys. We also receive direction from the Navy Staff through the Advanced Education Review Board process, as well as recommendations on process improvement from our Board of Advisors. On a continuing basis, our Office of Institutional Effectiveness measures the progress being made toward the goals established in our Strategic Plan. Assessment and introspection are woven into the fabric of the College's existence.

Joint Accreditation. At its core, the Naval War College is a Professional Military Education (PME) institution that, as a part of a Department of Defense-wide network of institutions, seeks to produce:

- Strategically minded officers educated in the profession of arms who possess an intuitive approach to joint war fighting built on individual service competencies.
- Critical thinkers who view military affairs in the broadest context and are capable of identifying and evaluating likely changes and associated responses affecting the employment of U.S. military forces.
- Senior officers who, as skilled joint war fighters, can develop and execute national military strategies that effectively employ the armed forces in concert with other instruments of national power to achieve the goals of national-security strategy and policy in the air, land, maritime, and space physical domains and the information environment (which includes cyberspace).

The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff has provided guidance on how each military service should execute its joint education mission. The Officer Professional Military Education Policy (OPMEP) instruction delineates the specific subject matter and skills that must be included in each PME educational program, and it establishes the Process for Accreditation of Joint Education (PAJE), which is a peer-review process that periodically (every six years) assesses the school's and college's educational programs to ensure that they are meeting all policy objectives. The Naval War College is currently conducting the final phases of its comprehensive self-study in preparation for two formal PAJE reviews that will take place during the 2015 calendar year. In May 2015, a PAJE team composed of educators and administrators from sister institutions and headquarters

staffs will review the Senior-Level College programs of our College of Naval Warfare. Another group will visit in November 2015 to evaluate the College of Naval Command and Staff and the College of Distance Education's Intermediate-Level College programs. Successful completion of these reviews will result in the reaffirmation of our status as an approved PME provider.

Regional Accreditation. In addition to the assistance and oversight provided by the Joint Staff, we also voluntarily seek feedback from the professional organization that monitors the performance of institutions of higher education in our geographical region. The Commission on Institutions of Higher Education (CIHE) of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges is one of seven accrediting commissions in the United States that provide institutional accreditation on a regional basis. In the most basic terms, accreditation is an expression of confidence in the institution's purposes, performances, and human and financial resources. The CIHE, which is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education, accredits approximately 240 institutions in the six-state New England region and overseas. These institutions achieve accreditation by demonstrating they meet the commission's eleven Standards for Accreditation, each of which articulates a dimension of institutional quality. The Naval War College has been accredited by the commission since 1989, when it became the first PME institution to be regionally accredited. For the past eighteen months we have been engaged in an intense and faculty-led process of self-study, addressing the CIHE standards. We completed a comprehensive evaluation visit in November 2014 by a team representing the commission, and in March 2015 the provost and I will appear before the commission to answer additional questions about our remarkable institution. We are confident that we will be recognized by our academic peers for the excellent work being done by our dedicated faculty and staff.

As you can imagine, we gather a lot of data from these detailed internal and external assessments. The key to future success is to capitalize on what we learn by having an open perspective and a willingness to make changes when and where necessary. We must preserve our impressive legacy but not be bound by it. We must be flexible and adaptable to accommodate ever-changing circumstances but not generate "churn" in our academic programs. We will continue to exercise rigor in our feedback and assessment efforts to ensure not only that we're "hitting what we're shooting at" but also that "we're shooting at the right targets" in all our educational efforts.

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