National War College Curriculum Review

Briefing for NDU Board of Visitors
May 21, 2013
Building the skills for a practitioner of strategy—a person in the arena.

CJCS Guidance: Prepare critical, creative thinkers for era of volatility and uncertainty

NDU Strategic Plan: Education and leader development to lead effectively in changing context

- Improved reflective judgment on complex issues
- Capacity for strategic and critical thinking and strategy development
- Knowledge of policy/strategy environment for effectiveness
Sources of Research and Evidence: Bottom-Up Curriculum Review

- Faculty interviews and dialogues
- Student surveys: Current and graduate
- Senior leader survey
- Research in literature on learning, teaching and curriculum
- Visits to counterpart institutions (eg HBS, HYU Stern, Wharton, Princeton)
- Visits to/interviews with centers of innovation in learning and teaching
The Basic NWC Model

- Substance is largely valid
- Achieves outcomes as measured by self-reporting, student achievement
- Active learning
- Peer-to-peer emphasis

Evidence of Success

- Survey of 2007 class: 91% of the students agreed (22%) or strongly agreed (69%) that the curriculum had prepared them well for future assignments and responsibilities.
- Of the 2010 class, 97% (70% strongly) agreed that the curriculum had specifically prepared them well for senior officer responsibilities; 95% believed it had prepared them well for interagency responsibilities.
- Of 2007 and 2010 classes, 99% agreed that the program had contributed to their ability to “critically and logically analyze strategic problems and issues”—with over 75% in the “strong agree” column.
- More than 88% said NWC improved their ability to “handle ambiguity and uncertainty”; 95 to 96% (65-67% strongly) agreed that it enhanced their ability to “adapt to the evolving characters of international relations and conflict.”
- 2010 PAJE concluded that the NWC curriculum “supports a uniquely valuable educational program specifically tailored to delivering tomorrow’s leader’s and strategists.”

So ... Why change?
Self-Assessment

- Improve depth of strategic and critical analysis; deepen intellectual rigor
- Enhance application focus / “doing” strategy; focus on “practitioner realism”
- Favor depth over breadth
- Improve synergy of curriculum, integration and coherence across instruments of power
- Overhaul treatment of strategic leadership
- Use best learning methodologies
Best Practices in Learning

- Learning to solve a problem in context
- Learning in collaborative, supportive groups
- From transmission of facts to analytical/life skills
- Reliance on feedback-based assessment
- Contingency—different approaches for different subjects, instructors, students
Specific Findings: Counterparts

- Most schools have limited ability to measure programmatic outcomes
- Key outcomes are least measurable
- Clear trend toward active learning approaches—but mix of teaching approaches can work well, and most are starting from lower % of active than NWC
- Trend toward skills versus facts/information
- Critical thinking amounts to sum of tools embedded in a curriculum
- Many schools moving toward more holistic curricula, modified student “choice”
Avenues to Improvement

- Command climate: Intellectually demanding
- Depth and sophistication of strategic analysis
- Model challenges of senior leaders with a curriculum of active learning processes focused on solving problems: Exercises, case studies, reports, peer-to-peer projects
- Focus on application of instruments to achieve strategic effect
- Promote synergy and integration of curriculum
- Place iteration and feedback at center of experience
- Do less and do it well; depth over breadth
Achieving a Higher Standard of Learning

Overall Theme: “A Year of Confronting Problems”

Core Substance
- International and domestic environment
- Strategic logic
- Instruments of power
- Nature/War

Presenting the Substance
- Doing strategy / active learning
- Peer-to-peer constructs
- Practitioner-modeling / partnering

Organizing the Substance
- Depth over breadth
- Integration and coherence of year

Improved Treatment
- More rigorous approach to strategic and critical analysis; depth of thinking
- Individual student mentoring

Enhanced Substance
- Strategic leadership
- Depth on instruments of power
- Interagency process
- Defense policy process and issues

Building blocks; each element relies on and enhances others
National War College Curriculum, AY13-14

Core Curriculum

- Elective 1
- Elective 2 / Field Studies
- Elective 3
- Elective 4

Electives

- Non-Mil Elements of Power
- Military Power
- Intro to Strategy
- Sponsored Project Practicum

Sponsored project prep sessions