

National War College Curriculum Review

Briefing for NDU Board of Visitors
May 21, 2013

Purpose of the Curriculum

The mission of the National War College is to educate future leaders of the Armed Forces, State Department, and other civilian agencies for high-level policy, command, and staff responsibilities by conducting a senior-level course of study in national security strategy.

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

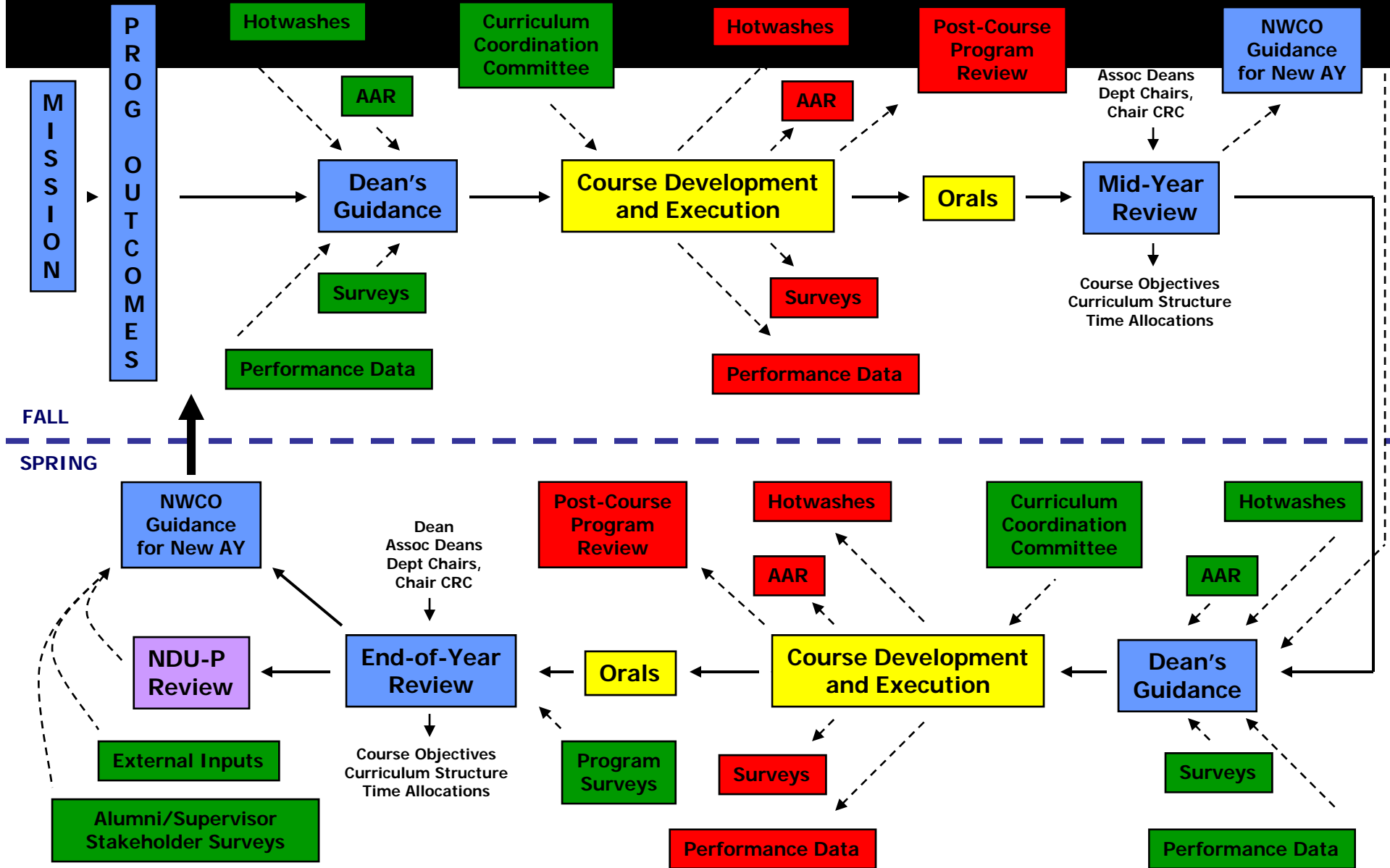
Building the skills for a *practitioner* of strategy—a person in the arena.

- Improved reflective judgment on complex issues
- Capacity for strategic and critical thinking and strategy development
- Knowledge of policy/strategy environment for effectiveness

Core learning outcomes



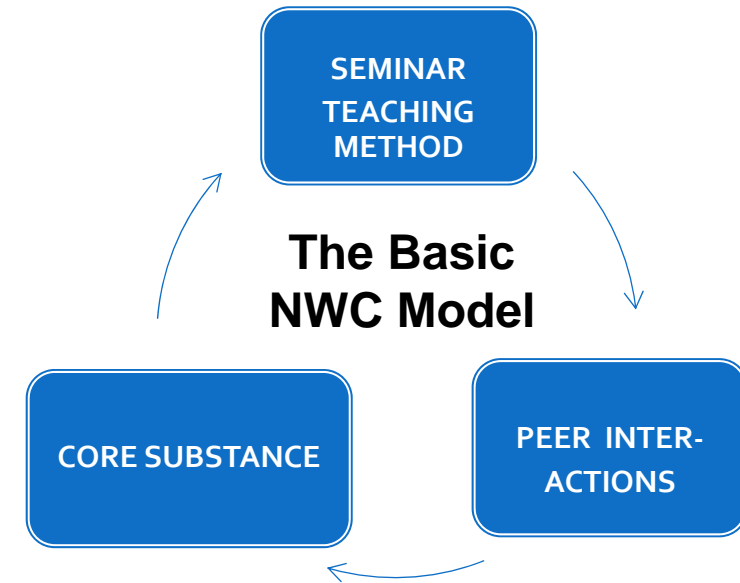
National War College Annual Curriculum Review Process



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 Existing 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

