



# NATIONAL DEFENSE UNIVERSITY

## Strategy for the Future

Pre-Decisional Draft





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## **Contents**

Mission, Vision, and Goals .....	2
The Challenge to NDU's Future.....	4
Responses to Changes in the PME Landscape .....	6
Strategic Initiatives.....	8
1: What Are We to Teach in This Dynamic Environment? .....	9
2: How Do Ensure Effective Learning Outcomes? .....	9
3: How Do We Meet the Challenge of Delivering PME?.....	11
Building an NDU Community .....	12



The National Defense University (NDU) has been preparing rising senior leaders for service in the U.S. military, international allied militaries, U.S. Government agencies, and with industry partners for over 40 years. NDU measures its success through its graduates, who demonstrate daily that they are able to lead at the highest levels of government in a complex security environment. Faculty and staff combine their talents to present the principles of strategic theory, develop their critical thinking, and show them how to creatively leverage knowledge and ideas in service to the common defense. In turn, each graduate understands, develops, and employs strategies that encompass all elements of national power, but with particular emphasis on the military instrument.

From its inception, NDU has been a leader among professional military education (PME) institutions in cultivating future leaders to become joint warfighters and senior decisionmakers who can lead the joint force, engage with allies and partners, and collaborate and coordinate with government agencies and national industries. They must be strategic leaders, ready to lead the combat-credible military forces needed to deter war and to fight and win when deterrence fails.

NDU has embraced this critical mission. As the National Defense Strategy states:

Today, we are emerging from a period of strategic atrophy, aware that our competitive military advantage has been eroding. We are facing increased global disorder, characterized by decline in the long-standing rules-based international order—creating a security environment more complex and volatile than any we have experienced in recent memory. This increasingly complex security environment is defined by rapid technological change, challenges from adversaries in every operating domain, and the impact on current readiness from the longest continuous stretch of armed conflict in our Nation’s history. In this environment, there can be no complacency—we must make difficult choices and prioritize what is most important to field a lethal, resilient, and rapidly adapting Joint Force.<sup>1</sup>

The purpose of this strategy is to ensure NDU educates joint warfighters in critical thinking and the creative application of military power to inform national strategy and globally integrated operations under the condition of disruptive change in order to conduct war.

Exceptional PME institutions adapt in order to meet the future of the changing character of war. Moreover, the University must now focus on corresponding shifts in priorities, strategies,

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<sup>1</sup> *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy: Sharpening the American Military’s Competitive Edge* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2018), 1.

and resources to align with Department of Defense (DOD) priorities. A call has been issued for transformation to identify what PME institutions provide and what the joint force needs from their graduates, both today and tomorrow.<sup>2</sup> NDU, therefore, must educate and prepare future senior leaders across the joint force to ensure that graduates are the “questioners” of strategic assumptions and the logic of current plans and policies. It is insufficient that NDU responds to changes in the strategic environment—the Nation needs us to anticipate those changes to transform our programs as required to best prepare our graduates to lead through those changes. Equally important, graduates must make informed and ethically based decisions and always act in a manner consistent with our values and our principles.

## Mission, Vision, and Goals

NDU is advancing its educational programs, research, and engagement to provide strategic joint leaders for the Services; DOD; interagency community; international friends, partners, and allies; and private-sector associates. The University is innovating how it educates students to become capable of strategic leadership and, in doing so, meet the military’s needs and ensure they have the intellectual breadth and overmatch needed to create strategic advantage for the United States and its international partners. To develop joint warfighters and national security leaders of the future, the University rigorously pursues the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff’s Vision:

NDU will create strategic advantage by developing rising national security professionals and forging relationships through whole-of-nations and whole-of-government educational programs, research, and other engagement.

NDU is evolving its people, processes, systems, and resource requirements to uniquely provide students with a singular opportunity to develop themselves for elite leadership positions and to forge lasting strategic relationships through well-designed whole-of-nations and whole-of-government educational programs, research, and engagement. In doing so, our mission, as the Chairman has defined it, is clear:

NDU educates rising national security professionals through rigorous academics, research, and engagement in order to develop critical thinkers,

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 8.



joint warfighters, and strategic leaders who can achieve intellectual overmatch and inform national strategy and globally integrated operations under the condition of disruptive change in order to conduct war.

NDU's tailored curriculum meets the specific needs of the Secretary of Defense, Chairman, and our Service and joint force stakeholders. This curriculum is enabled and enhanced by our physical location proximate to senior decisionmakers in the joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational environment. The University expects students to foster academic excellence and freedom, embrace diverse perspectives, seek holistic individual development, pursue life-long learning, demonstrate personal integrity, and model teamwork and communication skills necessary for senior military leaders.

To excel at this mission, NDU recognizes the challenging and uncertain future operating environment in which both the University and, more importantly, its graduates will compete. The National Defense Strategy acknowledges the reemergence of long-term strategic competition in

an increasingly complex global security environment, characterized by overt challenges to the free and open rules-based international order. From globalization, with its persistent and pervasive borderless communications, to the ever-present threats of global terrorism and rising nation-state competitors, NDU graduates must achieve intellectual overmatch against any adversary and thrive in this evolving environment of leadership challenges.

## The Challenge to NDU's Future

The core of NDU's PME curriculum is the Officer Joint Professional Military Education Policy that requires the "rigorous and thorough instruction and examination of officers of the armed forces in an environment designed to promote a theoretical and practical in-depth understanding of joint matters and, specifically, of the subject matter covered."<sup>3</sup> Joint PME (JPME), as a subset of PME, provides an educational foundation for joint leaders and supports the fulfillment of educational requirements. The landscape of JPME has been changing over the past 15 years. The demand for joint military education across all post-baccalaureate military institutions gave rise to a broad spectrum of colleges and schools accredited to deliver JPME II credentials, Service colleges have reorganized into large university structures offering integrated PME programs, and master's and doctoral degrees have become available through many of these institutions. NDU now must establish a clear identity to compete with all other PME institutions for the best students and faculty. More importantly, NDU must compete against other nations' PME institutions to produce graduates who can out-think adversaries.

The scholastic characteristics of our students (senior military officers and civilian leaders) are significantly changing, and the technology environment in which they will learn is transforming in rapid and unpredictable ways. This change is forging unforeseen adjustments in educational approaches and will shape NDU graduates' future duty assignments just as dramatically. Faculty and staff, as well as infrastructure, must adapt and evolve to manage these technological impacts successfully—and we must equip our students to manage these impacts of their future work assignments. The emergence of information as a joint function firmly underscores the increasing complexity of future operating environments that NDU graduates must be prepared to face.

Ethics in leadership, furthermore, is neither a luxury nor an option. More than simply a legal or moral responsibility, ethics needs to be a central organizational and leadership priority. Successful leaders of the future will have to know how to make informed, ethical decisions in an environment far more diverse and complicated than current conditions. More importantly, they will

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<sup>3</sup> Chapter 107 of Title 10 U.S.C. §2151.



have to demonstrate emotional intelligence in everything they do, which will become an essential element of success in the national security space. NDU must prepare its students to understand and work successfully as leaders of teams consisting of a multinational coalition of military personnel, civil servants, industry partners, members of nongovernmental organizations and international governmental bodies, and civilians. They will engage with counterparts of every conceivable background, culture, faith tradition, and identity. For these teams to reach their full potential, leaders must create workplaces of mutual respect that take full advantage of all contributions and realize the full potential of all team members.

The National Defense Strategy asserts that we face an “ever more lethal and disruptive battlefield, combined across domains, and conducted at increasing speed and reach—from close combat, throughout overseas theaters, and reaching to our homeland.”<sup>4</sup> Rapid, new commercial technologies are driving the changing character of war. The relentless development of new technologies is expanding to more actors with lower barriers of entry, and moving at ever increasing speed. The fact that most of these technological developments will arise from commercial sectors means that NDU must lead in preparing our future leadership through engagement with the national innovation environment and industrial base. Our graduates must be prepared to anticipate

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<sup>4</sup> *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy*, 3.



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the potential national security implications of a disruptive technology even without the ability to predict a specific innovation.

NDU graduates and the University community face constrained budgets, limitations on attracting and engaging sufficient faculty expertise to meet a growing need for subject matter experts in evolving technologies and disciplines, complex problems that demand increasing amounts of equipment, people, new ideas, adaptive systems, and the time to deal with them. Graduates, faculty, and staff, therefore, must have the skills and insight to adapt to changing social dynamics at home and abroad. Accordingly, for the University to remain the PME leader, it must be prepared to be innovative, agile, and willing to constantly adapt its people, processes, and support in such a way as to ensure mission success for NDU and its graduates.

## Responses to Changes in the PME Landscape

The National Defense Strategy also recognizes the complex nature of current and future competitive security environments. This “long-term strategic competition requires the seamless integration of

multiple elements of national power—diplomacy, information, economics, finance, intelligence, law enforcement, and the military.” The JPME component of meeting this competition requires a rigorous, integrated educational curriculum, essential to understand how to take advantage of “combined actions with the U.S. interagency [community] to employ all dimensions of national power.”<sup>5</sup> NDU will develop this whole-of-University program and curriculum in the near term—for academic year (AY) 2019–2020—through three specific initiatives:

- ◆ Produce Future Strategic Senior Leaders: Consistently produce graduates with an integrated perspective of the defense enterprise who will be ready to succeed in strategic leadership positions as general or flag officers (or civilian equivalent) engaged in joint warfighting, the interagency community, and international partnerships within 5 to 10 years after graduation. Future strategic leaders must adopt a competitive, adversary-oriented approach to the ever-changing character of conflict and security.
- ◆ Develop a University-wide ethics leadership curriculum: Ensure that all graduates of NDU are equipped to make well-informed, ethical decisions in an environment far more diverse and more complicated than current conditions. Strategic leaders must also fully appreciate the value and power of cognitive diversity to provide perspectives that enable better understanding of problems and reveal better solutions. The Secretary of Defense was clear: “Ethics transcends our three lines of effort. Admired leaders who coach and inspire self-disciplined teams strengthen readiness and lethality. Trust is the foundation of attracting and strengthening alliances and the confidence of the American people.”<sup>6</sup>
- ◆ Develop a University-wide emerging and disruptive technology leadership curriculum: Prepare future leaders to understand that information, technology, and innovation are strategic elements of warfighting, statecraft, and communication. Ensure the continued U.S. defense technological advantage by addressing changes in industry cultures and investment sources and the need for protection across the National Security Innovation Base.

NDU will foster a world-class learning culture for students, faculty, and staff that is focused on developing strategic officers ready to lead the combat-credible military forces needed to deter war and protect the security of our nation. To achieve this, we will need to gain and maintain effective mission support by establishing and incentivizing an integrated and customer-focused mission

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>6</sup> Memorandum by James Mattis, “Ethics Sentinels,” September 13, 2018.



support structure including the physical plant, information technology and library capabilities, governance, policies, processes, and procedures that are just as world-class as are our students, faculty, and staff. Any current project or expenditure that cannot be measured as positively contributing in a measurable way to the accomplishment of an assigned task in line with our objectives and overall strategy must be ended and its resources repurposed to support programs that do so.

## Strategic Initiatives

For the long-term—AY 2020 and beyond—NDU will look to transform its current programs to meet the challenges faced by answering three essential strategic questions:

- ◆ What Are We to Teach in This Dynamic Environment?
- ◆ How Do Ensure Effective Learning Outcomes?
- ◆ How Do We Meet the Challenge of Delivering PME?

These three interrelated and co-dependent objectives will be reached in such a way that all tasks undertaken by NDU must further the University on a path to achieving them together, as no one objective can be accomplished without the others as well.

## **1: What Are We to Teach in This Dynamic Environment?**

The National Security Strategy and National Defense Strategy define the complex and continuously developing challenges confronting the Nation and its allies. From traditional state-based competition to unconventional threats, such as terrorism, transnational crime, and insurgency, to emerging new threats, such as those found in the cyber and information environment, NDU's future students will have to wrestle with complex, globalized problems—and none of these challenges can be solved by any one nation alone.

NDU's educational program and research efforts must provide key support to the joint warfighter, interagency community, and our partner and allied nations. The University currently has a mix of programs and course content that meets these future requirements imperfectly, so we must set out to first identify what our graduates need to be taught and the skills they will require in order for them to think about the world they will face in different ways. NDU's core mission of ensuring that our graduates are able to advise and lead at the strategic level in a future featuring complex, global-scale, multidomain challenges requires a clear curricular program. Addressing such "wicked problems" will demand the successful integration of the Nation's full suite of tools.

Graduates will also have to be able to work with partners who are not U.S. or allied government officials, such as industry, nongovernmental organizations, and civil society. Our leaders must be prepared to embrace emerging technologies and recognize innovations to anticipate and offset our adversaries' advantages, mitigate our disadvantages, and exploit our own advantages. Because of the overwhelming speed of change in technology and innovation, it is unlikely that the military will have a monopoly on strategic effects in the future. It is imperative that our graduates must be capable of discerning and communicating the military dimensions of these and other emerging and transformative national security challenges at the strategic level.

## **2: How Do Ensure Effective Learning Outcomes?**

Once we understand what we need to teach, we must to address how we will teach our students, as they will have different needs and ways to process information than those who have preceded them. NDU must educate and prepare our future leaders to think clearly and strategically, especially under pressure. The Joint Force 2030 demands a cultural change within the joint force if we are to



remain the world's preeminent military force. NDU students of the next 5 years will be drawn from Millennials or Generation Y: the first globalized generation, having come of age during the rapid growth of immediate and borderless communications and a pervasive presence of global terrorism. Having never known a world without cellular and Internet connectivity, they are among the most resilient in navigating change. They are highly educated and already have an appreciation for diversity and inclusion. They also represent the most networked generation ever, as they have grown up during a time where relationships are easily established and nurtured online. As a reflection of both this generation and the National Defense Strategy's charge to use PME as a strategic asset to build partnerships, NDU must prepare for more international students seeking to attend who will represent a more diverse group of partner countries.

We must examine and incorporate best educational practices, such as use of the Socratic method and the case study method of analysis and critique, including active and ongoing self-evaluation of methods with a rigorous assessment of data to improve outcomes. It is essential that experiential learning is incorporated into pedagogical delivery. Wargaming, direct visits to industry partners and

supply chain systems, and direct engagement are essential to develop strategic maturity and agility. Academic technology is not only a tool but also a standard and matter of academic credibility. We must provide access to modern technology, advanced modeling and simulation, integrated geospatial information science and data, research and development tools and methods, and emerging technologies that contribute to decision support and analysis. Embracing new methods and means to analyze national security issues will provide innovative educational methods and technology to ensure students are prepared for the environment of their current and future assignments. Best practices for program development and execution, for the use of technology in the classroom and for enhancing research, are all advancing and changing rapidly in the higher education field, and we must stay abreast of these trends and seek to take advantage of them.

To teach a sophisticated curriculum in alignment with the National Security Strategy and National Defense Strategy, expanding PME to cleared partner participants is necessary. The identification of desired partner nations, level of classification-sharing, and sensitivity of engaging on a classified basis needs to be established. In addition, appropriate and secured classified facilities and communications are required and must be resourced. Funding is needed to provide the infrastructure upgrades in order to teach in a classified environment.

### **3: How Do We Meet the Challenge of Delivering PME?**

Once it has been determined what is being taught and how, then resources may be effectively applied to support the requirements. Similarly, it is important for NDU to continuously examine and implement reforms of administrative processes that focus on the life cycle of a student, faculty, or staff member rather than on the individual administrative functions themselves. The 9-month academic cycle of NDU's degree programs creates an academic environment that is compressed, complex, and difficult to manage. Students, faculty, and staff are required to learn and execute administrative processes that are in addition to any associated with current assignments.

Finally, NDU must assess its organizational structure and determine options to assure that it can deliver successful graduates effectively and efficiently. Our current structure has strengths that we intend to build on and a number of weaknesses that we will address. This part of the effort will be the most difficult, as it involves taking a hard look at where we are, which is in many ways identical to how we have been organized for decades and in other ways quite apart from what we can now see as our core strengths. We must look to optimize what we teach, how we teach it, and how we are organized to support that effort structurally so that NDU can continue to develop the joint strategic leaders that our nation requires..



## Building an NDU Community

To achieve these answers, NDU will form University-wide teams with assistance from the Joint Staff and academia organized in a way similar to that of our seminars, with talent and ideas from across the NDU community and beyond. These teams will seek to develop affordable and fully achievable solutions based on this strategy and informed by periodic senior-level guidance. Keys to success include developing relationships that dissolve any barriers to improving our current configuration, empowering each team member's parent organization to cooperate for the betterment of the University at the enterprise level, and fostering the same exemplary individual attributes that we expect to inculcate into our students. NDU's goal is to move forward in such a way as to remain the unquestioned leader in joint senior leader development.

Some specific requirements have already been developed by NDU leadership and its partners. The University needs to approach and institute change to collectively manage our programs through a continuing University perspective, likely best done with an appropriate standing review body below the senior leadership level that advises the Provost. Included in this review should be an annual evaluation of program success, determination of best practices, and evaluation of research into current graduate level teaching methods across academia. Development of a University-wide ethics in leadership curriculum, an articulated and strict academic integrity policy, and a comprehensive faculty professional development program are among the list of necessary improvements sought. From a support perspective, determining the future of our information technology, library resources, and options for community engagement will be integrated into this effort. An assessment of the requirements for classified working environments and classrooms will be necessary. Finally, in order to best manage the University in this future environment, all organizational and governance structures will be reviewed and assessed in terms of how well they support the efforts to improve NDU's performance of its Mission. What needs to be known is whether or not something we are doing is helping move the University forward toward our goals. If not, the NDU President needs to be in a position to promote change with those individuals as well as internal and external organizations that are slowing our progress.

NDU is taking stock of its people, processes, technology, curricula, physical spaces, and teaching methods and deliberately and collaboratively developing unique, cutting-edge academic programs, courses, simulations, experiences, and supporting infrastructure and processes in order to assure stakeholders, students, graduates, and faculty, and staff that we are truly the Nation's frontrunner in producing future strategic leaders. NDU has a unique opportunity to build its future, and we will do so by taking Abraham Lincoln's words to heart: "The best way to predict your future is to create it."





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