

FOR: National Defense University Board of Visitors

FROM: Lt Col Ann-Kristine Thrift, Student, Joint Advanced Warfighting School

SUBJECT: Statement for Board of Visitors, 24-25 May 2022

PURPOSE: Provide a student perspective to the Board of Visitors on the organizational and resource management of the Joint Advanced Warfighting School (JAWS), Joint Forces Staff College (JFSC), Norfolk, Virginia.

DISCUSSION:

Organizational Management: The Joint Advanced Warfighting School has a dedicated cadre of instructors focused on history and theory, strategy, and operational art and planning. The instructors are, however, poorly supported by National Defense University as a whole, and thereby take on many additional administrative tasks that detract from the curriculum and attention to student learning. For example, BlackBoard, which is the program of record for assignments and grading were often not updated or classes were not open for students. Instructors would then have to scramble to determine how to fix a problem that another organization is in charge of. Technical support for classroom audio-visual fell on instructors as well as a myriad of other administrative details such as verifying the status of computer-based training, coordination of distinguished visitor events, and the organization of file share folders. Additionally, the slow hiring process left the instructor cadre two instructors short, and with a cadre of only nine instructors it was a major limitation and the repercussions were felt by the students.

All of the demands on the instructors, while on the surface may seem reasonable, detracted from instructors' ability to develop curriculum and provide expertise to the students as well as leaving the impression of chaos and unprofessionalism.

Resource Management: As the Joint Forces Staff College is not collocated with the North Campus, it is often viewed as second rate despite graduating more students through the Joint Combined Warfighting School, than the North Campus. Therefore, not only are instructors at JAWS not provided support in terms of staffing, they are also provided a shoe string budget. Therefore, JAWS is not privy to the same caliber of guest speakers or field research trips as those at North Campus.

Additional Comments: Two additional personnel issues were strikingly obvious in class. One, the lack of diversity. There are only four women in the class and only three people of color (one student being both). The lack of inherent diversity promoted an echo-chamber in a school promoting creativity and strategic thinking. Two, senior leaders of the school did not interact with the students and therefore the students missed an opportunity to glean insight into the Chairman's mission, vision, and strategic direction for the school and outcomes.

PROBLEM: The JAWS faculty are not provided sufficient organizational support of resources to provide JAWS students the instruction expected of a senior development school. Diversity is not embraced and leadership remains aloof.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The problems outlined are far from unsurmountable. Simply recognizing Joint Forces Staff College as an equal to the other schools within the National Defense University and parsing out equitable resources for the support of a university, as well as providing oversight to said support, will alleviate many of the organizational issues. Included in the support, recruiting and on-boarding instructors quickly is a necessity.

Understanding Services choose the students for the classes and not the University, it is still incumbent on the University to promote diversity within the classroom and faculty.

Dedicated touch points with senior school leadership benefit for the students.

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