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Liberal Education

Educating Warriors: Globally Engaged and Culturally Aware

By: Maochun Miles Yu, Timothy Disher and Andrew T. Phillips

The United States Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland, has a clear and well-understood mission: to prepare leaders for service in the U.S. Navy or Marine Corps. As the navy's flagship undergraduate university, we graduate roughly one thousand students each year, and the time between graduation and commissioning as an officer in the navy or the Marine Corps (i.e., the moment of "getting hired" for their first job) is only about five minutes. Most people know something about "Navy," as we like to call it. They may know that we're an elite engineering school; in fact, 65 percent of our students—we refer to them as midshipmen—choose one of thirteen engineering and science major programs. They may know that midshipmen wear uniforms, march in parades, and "muster" daily for formation and meals. They may know that midshipmen have demanding academic course loads; the average is eighteen credit hours per semester for exactly eight semesters (it's a four-year program, by law). They may know that about ninety credit hours—the majority of which are in science and engineering—are in our common "core" curriculum that all midshipmen must take regardless of major. They may know that in addition to the academic demands, all midshipmen must be active in some athletic activity every day, including sports at the varsity, club, or intramural level. And they may know that all midshipmen also must learn and demonstrate leadership skills, military discipline, and ethical and moral responsibility. But what most people don't know is that Navy also provides a top liberal education to all midshipmen, and that one of the central elements of that liberal education is an understanding of global and cross-cultural dynamics.

It should come as no surprise that our military leaders need a strong foundation in and understanding of global cultures and foreign languages. In the post-9/11 world, it became clear to the Department of Defense that a few fundamental adjustments in its overall strategies were necessary. Overwhelming our enemy with firepower and technology alone is no longer sufficient; we have to develop our abilities to collaborate and cooperate with international partners, to comprehend and communicate in different ways with peoples who think and behave very differently from ourselves, and to understand that complex human interactions occur daily on the "battlefield," either in face-to-face encounters or in military-facilitated humanitarian, disaster relief, and peacekeeping efforts. These adjustments made it imperative that the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps take action quickly to adjust our educational preparation for our nation's future military leaders. That imperative took the form of a major doctrinal policy, announced in October 2007, known as "A Cooperative Strategy for Twenty-First-Century Seapower,"

or "Maritime Strategy" for short.

Curricular change

The Maritime Strategy

integrates seapower with other elements of national power, as well as those of our friends and allies. It describes how seapower will be applied around the world to protect our way of life, as we join with other like-minded nations to protect and sustain the global, interconnected system through which we prosper. Our commitment to protecting the homeland and winning our nation's wars is matched by a corresponding commitment to preventing war.

An essential mechanism to reach this comprehensive goal is to develop an advanced set of skills in language, regional expertise, and cultural awareness (we'll refer to these elements as "global education" from here forward) in critical regions vital to the interests of the United States. As the primary undergraduate educational institution responsible for educating and training the future leaders of the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps, the Naval Academy plays a central role in providing this foundation.

And yet, the challenge of exposing our midshipmen to meaningful global experiences remains daunting. Chief among these challenges is time. A midshipman has many mandatory responsibilities each day, and the daily schedule and regimen is strict and unforgiving. It is obvious to any who visit the campus that a midshipman seems in a perpetual state of motion, moving from task to task beginning before the sun rises and ending well after the rest of us have gone to bed. The dilemma for our global education undertaking is that cultivating skills and knowledge in these areas requires time, both for the experience itself and for the reflection on that experience. Hence, the central problem facing the academy is this: how do you expand existing opportunities for global education in a situation where time is at a premium, and many educational and professional training needs are dictated to us by the Navy and Marine Corps? These constraints make it difficult to adopt traditional approaches to global education, such as study abroad programs. The answer would seem to be (1) adapt civilian models for the delivery of global education to the unique constraints faced by the academy; (2) find ways to add a global education element to things we were doing anyway; and (3) take advantage of unique opportunities available to us as a service academy that are not available to civilian universities. How we have expanded such opportunities in the face of severe time constraints and external requirements is what makes the academy's experience unique.

Unlike most civilian universities, the Naval Academy must graduate a midshipman within four years, which makes the ninety-credit core curriculum—only part of the roughly 140-credit total program of study—extremely inflexible and very difficult to change, at least in the eyes of most academics. Nevertheless, while we may have been slower than other universities to adapt, we successfully infused many global-education elements into that core curriculum. One result was a change in the history requirement of the core curriculum, which traditionally consisted of three required courses for every midshipman: U.S. Naval History, Western Civilization I, and Western Civilization II. To provide a more global exposure

reinforcing the regional and cultural emphasis, the academy reshaped Western Civilization I into The West in a Global Context, and Western Civilization II into The West in the Modern World, both of which have greatly increased the exposure to global content in these more traditional courses. In addition, we have also added two new courses, Asia in a Global Context and The Middle East in a Global Context, as allowable alternatives to the first of these two core courses (i.e., The West in a Global Context). These two additions have proved to be greatly popular among midshipmen, and the sections always fill to capacity.

Outside of the core curriculum, we have expanded and enriched our elective and majors program curriculum as well, emphasizing greater internationalization. The language studies department provides not just foreign language training, but a foreign language education by offering language major and minor programs in both Chinese and Arabic and language minor programs in Russian, Japanese, French, German, and Spanish. Foreign language education focuses simultaneously on increased language capabilities and cultural competency through the study of specific topics in courses such as Window on Arabic Culture, Arabic Discourse in Society, Modern Arabic Literature, Chinese Culture through Films, Twentieth-Century Chinese Literature, and Intercultural Communication. The political science department has expanded its traditional offerings to include titles such as The Middle East International Politics, Asia International Politics, Islam and Politics in Southeast Asia, and National Security Policy of Japan. The English department has added courses entitled Topics in Continental Literature and Topics in Multiethnic Literature, and regional offerings in the history department have also experienced a dramatic increase. In Asian history, for example, the course offerings alone have increased in number from two just a few years ago to between eight and ten courses per year now, including Chinese Military History; Japanese Cultural History; Samurai; Islam and Cultural Changes in South Asia; and Asian Revolutionary Biographies.

It is equally significant to emphasize that the recently implemented curricular enhancements in the humanities are closely attuned and coordinated with the study of global political and economic dynamics in the context of pertinent theoretical interpretations and empirical outcomes. Both the political science and economics departments offer a vibrant and topical mélange of courses that provide a comprehensive and systematic framework for the study of languages, cultural environments, and historical processes. These courses focus on political transformations and various models of economic development and include a mandatory core curriculum course, U.S. Government and Constitutional Development.

Extracurricular opportunities

While the curricular revisions are important, we regard our challenge to support and implement the Maritime Strategy as much greater than a simple modification of academic course content. Meaningful global education requires a holistic approach that also demands an extracurricular component to expose our midshipmen continuously to global themes outside the classroom to complement and put into practice what is being taught inside the classroom.

The task involves creating and maintaining a global awareness at the Naval Academy so that the midshipmen will be constantly

involved in and exposed to current events, cultural changes and conflicts, policies, and plans affecting strategic regions of the world. To this end, we have adapted the concept of graduate-level interdisciplinary research centers that focus on different regions of the world to the unique needs of an undergraduate institution by creating five regional studies forums. These support weekly lectures, performances, and films focused on Africa, Asia, Latin America, Eurasia, and the Middle East (which, in particular, is sponsored by a generous philanthropic grant). Supported by faculty members from across the disciplines, the creation of these regional forums has changed the landscape regarding cultural awareness at the academy. At present, two or three regional-themed lectures or presentations every week are the norm, but it is not rare for there to be as many as four or five each week.

These regional forums have been enormously popular among the midshipmen and faculty. In a general sense, they have served us very well in providing exposure to regions and cultures previously not sufficiently known to or understood by our midshipmen. Our regional forums have played host to the presentation of cutting-edge research and knowledge and an abundance of fresh and exciting ideas by nationally and internationally known experts. For example, representing the Africa Forum, Thomas Woods, former deputy assistant secretary of state for Africa, spoke about African nationalism, and author Gerard Prunier spoke on warfare in Africa. Representing the Asia Forum, Washington-based pundit Robert Kagan spoke on managing the rise of China from a historical perspective, and author Jung Chang spoke about Chairman Mao and Chinese political culture. Representing the Eurasia Forum, Adeed Khalid of Carlton College spoke about Islam in Central Asia, and former Reagan and Bush State Department senior official Ambassador Paula Dobriansky provided her insights on environment, health, and human traffic in Russia and Eastern Europe. Representing the Latin American Forum, Mexican Senator Raul Mejia spoke on the Mexican economy and violence, while Dennis Jett, the former ambassador to Mozambique and Peru, spoke on fighting future wars in Africa and Latin America. And the Naval Academy's Center for the Middle East and Islamic Studies, which represents the Middle East Forum, featured Rashid Khalidi speaking on historical perspectives of democracy in the Middle East, and Ambassador John Limbert, one of the fifty-five American hostages held in Iran in 1979, provided his wisdom and insights into Middle Eastern culture and politics.

The forums also have provided an effective mechanism for a robust exchange of ideas between the invited speakers and the Naval Academy community. Every session contains a lively question-and-answer period that often becomes the highlight of the talk. Most speakers have expressed surprise at the high level of sophistication and intellectual acumen of our midshipmen, all of whom attend these talks voluntarily. Our faculty members are also heavily involved and often present their own research and new ideas. Our resident Russian language expert has provided her insights into Russia's social welfare problem; our Japanese language professor presented her recent study on cultural analysis of Japanese conversation; and our Southeast Asia historian shared his research with the midshipmen on the Thai-Cambodian military relationship.

Study abroad

Another extracurricular component of our new efforts to

Immerse midshipmen in language and culture is a traditional study abroad program that has been modified to suit our specific circumstances. Our semester study abroad program began five years ago and, due to federal law, must be completed without delaying graduation beyond the four-year limit. We observe the greatest impact on midshipmen who attend semester-length student exchanges with foreign naval academies that immerse our midshipmen in foreign language development (i.e., all classes are taught in the host nation's language), that generate better understanding of how foreign militaries prepare their future leaders, and that create greater cultural awareness. Since most foreign countries have only one institution that educates their future naval military leaders, a Naval Academy midshipman (usually in the junior or senior year) who studies abroad for a semester in a host nation's military academy will likely become friends with the future senior navy and marine corps military leaders of that country. Such is how strong allies are created.

In cases where it is not possible to support an academy-to-academy exchange (e.g., in China), our midshipmen study at a civilian university, typically enrolling in content courses taught in English and language courses taught in the host language. Most recently, however, we have begun to engage in 100 percent language immersion programs in both China and Egypt (for Arabic), where our midshipmen enroll in coursework taught exclusively in the host language in all courses. But whether the experience is an academy-to-academy exchange or a one-way civilian university study abroad experience, we are only able to support twenty-five to thirty midshipmen per year in such programs.

For larger groups of midshipmen, we offer a four- to six-week language immersion program during the summer called the Language Study Abroad Program (LSAP) to support the seven foreign languages taught at the academy. Participating midshipmen typically have completed at least four semesters of formal language courses. As an example, the annual program in Spain incorporates elements of formal language classes, living with a host family, cultural excursions close to the home base of Salamanca, and a final week spent at the Spanish naval academy.

In contrast to civilian universities, the Naval Academy is unable to provide full-length summer semester study abroad experiences because, when the academic year ends in May of each year, the educational focus shifts to the professional development of the future leaders of our military. In Annapolis, this means the summer is divided into three consecutive four-week "blocks," and each midshipman is required to select professional activities that occupy two of those blocks. While this eliminates traditional semester study abroad in the summer, it does provide several options for professional engagement opportunities with foreign navies. One such professional activity occurs aboard a tall training ship—an official foreign navy vessel that transports the senior (graduating) class of foreign students for a six- to eight-month cruise around large portions of the world. When possible, the Naval Academy will permit a midshipman to join the foreign navy for a four-week segment of that cruise and, thereby, become totally immersed in the language and military culture of that nation's naval fleet. For example, midshipmen with sufficient Japanese language proficiency recently embarked on several Japanese training ships in Istanbul, and were integrated

into a crew consisting of approximately two hundred Japanese officer candidates and another fifteen international midshipmen from other foreign naval academies around the world.

For the largest groups of midshipmen (over 150 or so per year), we offer several shorter-duration and faculty-led programs with a focus on cultural development, not on language proficiency. A recent example from the spring of 2009 involved two professors (from political science) and eight midshipmen traveling to Malaysia and Cambodia for ten days to study regional poverty through interaction with local populations and community projects. Between the semester study abroad program, the LSAP program, and the faculty-led culture programs, we send almost four hundred midshipmen abroad each year to facilitate their international experiences.

Conclusion

At the Naval Academy, we know that we must prepare our future naval leaders for a very different world. It is one of our signature institutional goals to educate leaders who are *adaptable* and who appreciate global and cross-cultural dynamics. We must educate warriors and leaders who know how to communicate with peoples from different cultures, who speak different languages, who practice different customs and religions, and who exhibit patterns of behavior very different from our own. Our graduates can expect to be deployed overseas in the very near future. They can expect to be immersed in a culture vastly different from our own, and they should expect to adapt to that culture.

We face a rapidly globalizing world, over 70 percent of which is covered by water, with 90 percent of its population living within a few hundred miles of the ocean. It is in this context that our current and future leaders in the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps will encounter a much more integrated system of cultures and societies, and they will do so with an enhanced knowledge and understanding of those regions, cultures, and languages. The new Maritime Strategy "focuses on *opportunities*—not threats; on *optimism*—not fear; and on *confidence*—not doubt." Only through robust language, regional expertise, and cultural awareness programs at places such as the United States Naval Academy can we embrace these opportunities with optimism and confidence.

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